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# FOODSERVICE and Hospitality

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The 2004  
Pinnacle  
Awards

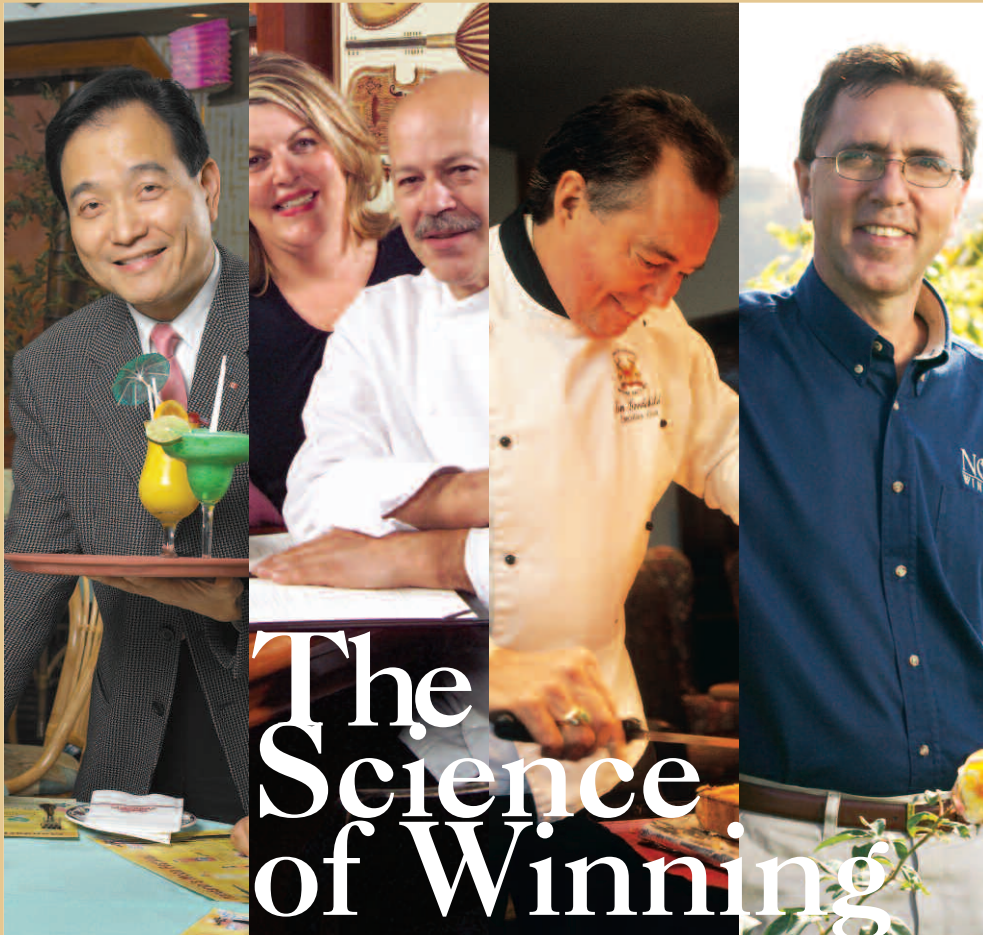
James  
and  
the  
Giant  
Buffet

Mandarin  
makes  
Company  
of the Year

BURNING  
HOT  
The truth  
about  
combi  
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HUG ON  
A PLATE  
Soup and  
sarnies  
give  
comfort

BOTTLED  
BLING  
Hip hop  
over to  
cognac



# The Science of Winning

*Somewhere between* assembling egg rolls and selecting Chianti, there's a restaurant team keeping it all together. There's also a restaurateur, who's often also an entrepreneur, and maybe a handful of silent — and not-so-silent — business partners. Even further back, there's a culinary school that, like a patissier squeezing jelly into doughnuts, fills minds with gastronomic guile.

The science of baking is an appropriate metaphor for what happens behind the scenes of a restaurant. If you've ever tried baking and substituted the wrong ingredient, only to have the chocolate cookie crumble in your hand, you'll know there's a delicate science to keeping it all together. Similarly, the restaurant, in its intricacies, is bound by a team with the same mien and goal: work hard and feed the people well. Flip through the following pages and read the stories of this year's 2004 Pinnacles Award winners. There's a company, two restaurateurs, an entrepreneur and a supplier. They keep it all together, and then some.

Entrepreneur of the Year

# West Side Story

Tom Goodchild's powerhouse Sawmill Restaurant Group feeds Edmonton by Patrick Allossery photography by Roth and Ramberg

**It was an early lesson** courtesy of the school of hard knocks, but it continues to serve him well today. When Tom Goodchild was 14, his father — a hardworking British immigrant who arrived in Edmonton in 1957 with his wife, three kids and \$50 in his pocket — took him aside and delivered the news that, henceforth, he would be responsible for buying his own clothing.

At the time, Goodchild senior had a steady job as a bus driver with the city of Edmonton. "But there wasn't a lot of money to go around," recounts Goodchild, who would go on to found Edmonton's largest foodservice organization, Sawmill Restaurant Group Ltd., which comprises three corporate-owned locations and employs more than 400 workers.

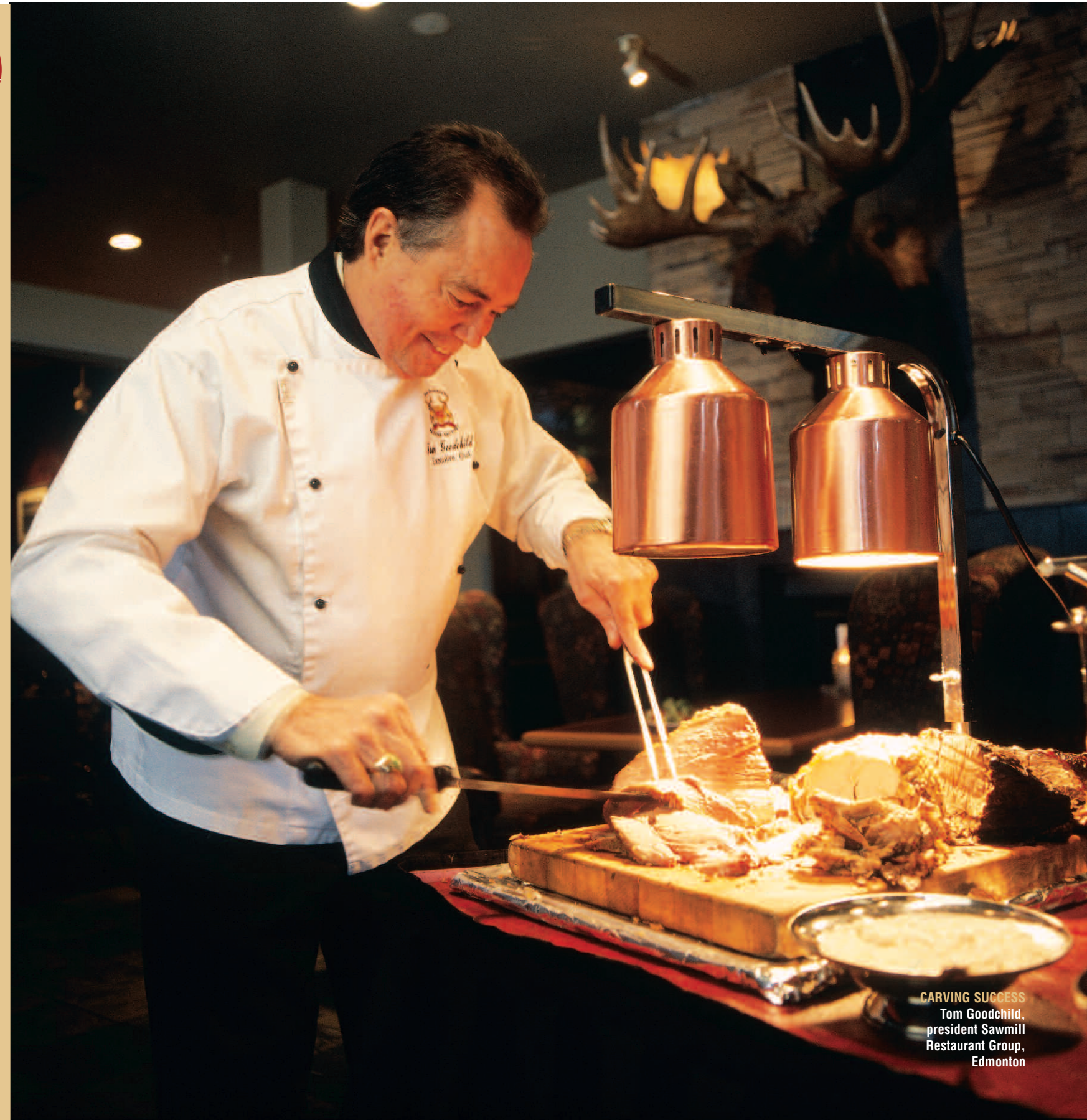
The family's economic status aside, Goodchild notes that immigrant parents in that era would often expect their children to contribute financially to the household as soon as they were able. So he didn't spend time dwelling on his circumstances. Instead, he followed up a lead provided by a regular on his father's bus route and quickly landed himself a job clearing tables at Edmonton's Kind Edward Hotel.

Goodchild recalls holding two and three jobs at a time almost continuously from that point until age 25 when he bought his first restaurant. "Nobody has given me anything I didn't earn," Goodchild says

emphatically. But he's not complaining. The 53-year-old entrepreneur insists that consistent labour has been the secret to his success as a restaurateur.

Passionate about the business from the get-go, he made a point of trying every position available during his stint at the King Edward Hotel. He also waited tables at the Edmonton Inn, managed the Steak Board and worked at The Bay as foodservice manager for three department stores.

He speculated in the Edmonton real estate market and it was this last line of work, which he pursued on the side from age 21 to 25, that financed his transition



CARVING SUCCESS  
Tom Goodchild,  
president Sawmill  
Restaurant Group,  
Edmonton

from restaurant worker to restaurant owner. Although he admits he wasn't always certain of the risks, Goodchild borrowed money to build a mini real estate empire consisting of 13 homes, a four-plex, six acreages and a half interest in an office building.

"The thing was," Goodchild says, "I didn't feel I knew enough about real estate to be that deeply involved. So I decided to get into a business that I felt comfortable with." That business, naturally, was the restaurant business. By 25, Goodchild could claim more than a decade's worth of hands-on foodservice experience. Plus he had studied hospitality management at Edmonton's Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT).

He sold one of his properties and teamed up with a partner to start what would become The Sawmill Original, his flagship family style eatery located on Edmonton's Calgary Trail North. "We opened the doors and immediately started losing money," Goodchild recalls. "Business was good, and we were growing rapidly, but our costs were too high."

Turning the business around proved to be a long and difficult challenge. Fortunately, the sale of some properties Goodchild had in reserve covered his day-to-day losses. His parents, Fred and June, left their jobs and bought out his partner, making The Sawmill not just family oriented but family operated as well. They never backed down from the long hours of work involved, and profits began to flow. Between 1976 and 1979, revenues grew from \$380,000 to \$900,000.

In 1980, Goodchild invested in the first of many upgrades he would make over the years to his various restaurants. First, he bought Sawmill Original's building and the land on which it sat. Next, he bought an adjoining lot and expanded the building to 10,000 sq. ft. from 4,800 sq. ft. Goodchild underestimated how much additional business his upgrades would attract. Over the course of four more renovations, the last of which occurred in 1989, he expanded the restaurant to three times its original size.

"I have seen too many cases where people have been quick to take profits out, rather than invest in the business. Customers notice that," he says. "They appreciate when you make an effort, and when you don't, they take their business elsewhere."

Over the years, Goodchild opened a variety of other restaurants, including two more Sawmill outlets. Like Sawmill Original, Sawmill Prime Rib and Steakhouse specializes in AAA Alberta Prime Rib and features a self-serve salad bar. Sawmill Pacific Fish Co., in downtown Edmonton, focuses on seafood dishes, but also serves up plenty of beef.

Earlier this year, these two restaurants were sold to private investors as part of the company's new franchising program. In the mid-1990s, Goodchild opened Hard Rock

Edmonton and, in his first and only venture outside the city, Hard Rock Vancouver. Both were sold several years ago.

In 1996, Goodchild added what has arguably become the biggest success in his privately held restaurant group — The Moose Factory. Situated on the opposite side of the Calgary Trail from Sawmill Original, Moose Factory was 8,000 sq. ft. when he purchased it and has since been expanded to 20,000 sq. ft. The combined seating capacity in the dining room, lounge, banquet room and patio tops 700. Goodchild also owns a 700-seat banquet hall, which serves a busy noon buffet and does the cooking for Sawmill Restaurant Group's flourishing catering division.

At its height in the late 1990s, Sawmill Restaurant Group generated annual revenues of \$38 million. More recently, prior to the sale of the two Sawmill locations, annual revenues have totalled about \$20 million.

Goodchild has been conscientious about giving back to the community. Every year, his restaurants hold fundraising events and donate thousands of dollars to organizations such as the Children's Health Foundation, NAIT, Stollery Children's Hospital and the Alberta Heart Foundation. As well, Goodchild has funded a meal program for the past three and a half years that provides hot lunches three times a week to 440 children in two inner-city Edmonton schools.

Goodchild remains closely involved in the management of the company he founded. However, day-to-day operations are handled by his son Tasker, 27, who is district manager, and Len McCullough, who is operations director. McCullough, a 20-year veteran of the company, describes Goodchild as a demanding employer who is also "extremely generous and compassionate." People know they will be rewarded for their hard work, he says, adding, "If you look after our guests, Tom will look after you."

For his part, Goodchild says there is no secret to what makes a successful restaurant. It's all about meeting people's expectations. "When a person walks into one of my restaurants and if a hostess isn't there to meet them with a smile and a neat uniform, you can be certain I'll get a phone call the next day telling me how lousy the service was."

Goodchild is excited his company is entering a new phase. The focus will be on selling franchises and helping new owners succeed. Interested parties in Western Canadian cities including Calgary, Red Deer and Winnipeg have contacted him.

He's taking it slow, however, as he's extremely particular about whom he does business with. "I could easily accept people's money but that's not what I want. For their sake as well as mine, I first want to be sure they have a good basic understanding of the industry and are well financed."

Even then, there's no guarantee of success. The final vital ingredient to making it in the restaurant trade is a limitless capacity for hard work. That's something Goodchild knows a great deal about. □