



Apply  
(<http://www.auburn.edu/admissions/attention-applicants.html>)



Libraries (<http://lib.auburn.edu>)



Give (<http://www.auburn.edu/give>)



AU Access (<http://auaccess.auburn.edu>)

(<http://www.auburn.edu>)



"Finance, math and numbers, I enjoyed it all. I feel it translates over to cooking because it's a science. Preparing food is kind of science in which you must be precise."

Missy Mercer  
Chef

## AUBURN SPOTLIGHT

Auburn graduate and chef Missy Mercer has been adding flavor to the Montgomery food scene for more than 10 years. At her pizzeria in Cloverdale, Tomatino's, you can get pies piled with meatballs and fresh veggies. Gelato drizzled with toffee awaits you at her other establishment, Louisa's Café and Bakery.

Mercer learned her craft at the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco. Afterward, she worked under renowned chef Wolfgang Puck, but her journey into cooking started before all that, at Auburn University where she earned her degree in finance.

Mercer believes some of her success as a chef can be traced back to her days on the plains.

"I think a lot of people go into the restaurant business without seeing the whole picture. I'm more than just banking daily. For me, I'm taking care of labor, food costs and payroll. Just constant percentages, numbers and keeping cash where it needs to be. I think that's something that Auburn definitely helped me prepare for," said Mercer.

In fact, her finance degree helped her start out in a way she didn't foresee.

"I went to the bank for my first loan to get the restaurant 15 years ago. Restaurant businesses are super risky, so they really don't want to give you any money. The loan agent said to me, 'Because of your finance degree, you're going to get this loan,'" said Mercer.

For Mercer, her knowledge in finance doesn't just influence the business side of her endeavors, but it's directly related to creating that perfect cannoli.

"Finance, math and numbers, I enjoyed it all. I feel it translates over to cooking because it's a science. Preparing food is kind of science in which you must be precise. I feel like it's the same side of the brain working," said Mercer.

Mercer still loves numbers and the stock market. She enjoyed getting her degree in finance, but she discovered it wasn't what she wanted to do as a career. Her advice to current Auburn students is to find out if they're passionate about their degree.

"Just go intern. Whether it's a month or two months, see if you actually like what you think you're going to like. I interned in an accounting firm for tax season. It was awful for me. I have a lot of accountants in family, so I thought that was what I wanted to do, but then I realized it wasn't," said Mercer.

During her junior year at Auburn, Mercer found herself watching episodes of cooking shows featuring Julia Child and Graham Kerr and becoming increasingly fascinated with the complex French and Italian dishes created on the screen. She spent her free time cooking eggplant parmesan and teaching the basics to her roommates. Eventually, she realized that her passion wasn't in the bank but in the kitchen.

"I got into researching culinary schools, and I told my parents that I wanted to go. They were like, 'Are you kidding me? You better finish your degree at Auburn!'"

Mercer received her diploma from Auburn and left to pursue her dream in California.

"It's 18 months, five days a week, eight hours a day. Pretty much, if you can work while you're in school, it prepares you for what it's really like," said Mercer.

Once she graduated from the California Culinary Academy, she worked for a couple years in the kitchen of a Colorado ski resort and then moved back to California to study under Wolfgang Puck. Eventually, Mercer found herself returning home to Alabama and working in the capital.

"My family, who owned a restaurant in Montgomery, was opening a new restaurant. The owner said they wanted and needed me to be the chef," said Mercer.

When Mercer moved back, she was reminded of how friendly the southern customer is.

"The customer experience here is so amazing because they really want to talk to you, find out what's going on and give feedback all the time, which I love. They're real, and I'll tell you, they are the most loyal customers," said Mercer.

Mercer credits her loyal patrons and success to attentive customer service and meticulously sourced ingredients.

"As long as you can, you've got to have consistency. Obviously, you've got to have good customer service and I always tell my employees that all the time. We also use a lot of high-quality ingredients like butters and chocolates. We just try to source wherever we can get the best stuff," said Mercer.

Since getting her degree from Auburn, Mercer released a tailgate cookbook in 2011 with her husband, and says every time she visits, she's amazed at how Auburn has changed and grown in the 23 years since she's graduated.

"Auburn is huge now compared to when I went there. It is so different. It's more of a place to dine now than it used to be," said Mercer.

Due to its recent expansion, and her affection for the Loveliest Village, Mercer isn't ruling out opening a restaurant in Auburn.

"We probably will expand, eventually. That's kind of the natural progression. I think our business is good. The pizza would do fabulous up there," said Mercer.