

Hey, What's up With That?

With Nicholas Pitillo

Premium content from Business First by James Fink, Buffalo Business First Reporter

Date: Friday, April 27, 2012, 6:00am EDT

To say that [Nick Pitillo](#) was born into the restaurant and hospitality industry is an understatement. But how else to describe someone whose late father, Mike, ran three Rusty Nail bars in Ellicottville, Jamestown and Limestone and Nick, at age 11, began working in the family business?

“OK, so it was sweeping the parking lot of the Rusty Nail (in Ellicottville),” Pitillo, 44, says with a laugh. “But it was in the industry.”

By 13, he was working at Ellicottville’s Madigan’s, where Pitillo was a dishwasher and busboy during high school.

Fast-forward several decades and he has an impressive resume of working for Delaware North Cos. and Mount Snow Ski Resort and helping to start Sonoma Grille.

He’s been with **Seneca Gaming Corp.** since 2005, currently as food and beverage department manager and training coordinator. He’s also general manager of La Cascata restaurant in **Seneca Niagara Casino & Hotel**.

Pitillo runs OGP Training and Consulting LLC, too, which specializes in training employees in the restaurant and hospitality industry on various skills, including how to deal with customers who have had one drink too many. He runs the firm with his business partner, [Dale Stephens](#).

Pitillo is a certified agent of Training for Intervention Procedures, or TIPS, which offers programs to help train people to responsibly serve, sell and consume alcohol. By completing Pitillo’s training, restaurant and bar owners can save on liability costs and may get reduced fines for liquor authority violations after serving to an intoxicated customer.

“Anyone in our industry who comes into contact with alcohol should go through this training,” he said.

Pitillo runs many sessions in conjunction with the Western New York chapter of the New York Restaurant Association, which identifies him as the preferred trainer.

The program runs from five-hour sessions for on-premise servers to three hours for concession-stand servers. Pitillo offers at least one session a month, including one at Coca-Cola Field set for May 8 and another at the Russell J. Salvatore School of Hospitality and Business at **Trocaire College’s** Lancaster location.

“Our focus is more about understanding situations and learning how to deal with them in a friendly, peaceful way,” he said.

The sessions are designed to be interactive. Participants watch videos of taped situations such as unruly or obviously intoxicated customers and then discuss how to resolve the issue.

He said he focuses on teaching participants to look for “behavioral cues” such as bloodshot eyes, slurred speech, silverware being dropped and agitated moods.

“Because I’ve been there, because I’ve been behind the bar for many years, it gives me a lot of credibility,” Pitillo said. “I’m not just some talking head. I’ve had to deal with all of those situations and then some.”

OGP – named for Pitillo’s daughter, [Olivia Grace](#) – also conducts training sessions on post-opening controls, wines, culinary matters and overall service. But it’s the TIPS training that is Pitillo’s calling card.

“What to do with and about the ‘over-served’ is really the biggest issue we deal with,” Pitillo said.

Training seminars have taken him around the country, including South Dakota and cities across the Northeast. All are done on his downtime away from the casino, which is his primary job and focus, he said.

“It’s a balancing act,” he said.