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Rodney Scruggs *Executive Chef*

Beginning his culinary career in Washington more than twenty years ago, Rodney Scruggs has seen the DC restaurant scene transform into an intense hub of culinary creativity. As Executive Chef of Occidental Grill & Seafood, Scruggs skillfully balances creating innovative cuisine with the demand for traditional favorites in an establishment that is not only 103 years old, but also seen as a DC institution among Washington natives, politicians and celebrities alike.

Inspired by both his mother and grandmother, Scruggs pursued his passion for cooking when he studied the Culinary Arts at Newbury College in Massachusetts. His first job experience came from where he currently resides at the helm of the kitchen: the Occidental. At just 18 years old, he walked into Occidental as a line cook, and discovered his addiction to the creativity and energy that are ever present in the kitchen. From 1986 until 1993, Scruggs worked his way up from line cook to Executive Sous Chef, gaining valuable knowledge and discipline from then Occidental Executive Chef Jeffrey Buben, currently of Vidalia and Bistro Bis fame.

After seven years of Buben's tutelage, Chef Scruggs was lured away to Galileo to work with Chef Roberto Donna for one and a half years. Subsequently, Scruggs was offered a position he could not refuse at the Imperial Hotel on Maryland's Eastern Shore. During his three years as Executive Chef, Scruggs learned how to juggle the pressures of handling a restaurant menu and turned the Imperial from a small inn to a destination.

Following his time at the Imperial Hotel, Scruggs joined the ranks of Chef Francesco Ricchi and was asked to be the Chef de Cuisine at Ricchi's "Cesco's Trattoria" in Bethesda. From there, he reunited with his mentor Chef Buben to open the renowned Bistro Bis on Capitol Hill. Following Bistro Bis, Scruggs served as private chef for the President of American University for four years until deciding to return to the Occidental.

Chef Scruggs returned to the DC dining destination in 2005, shortly before the Occidental's 100th anniversary, bringing with him a wealth of experience and a clear creative direction for his cuisine. Providing a needed rejuvenation to the kitchen, Scruggs crafted the menu to capture the restaurant's history as well as its significance in the DC community. Armed with his new selection of dishes, the restaurant reopened after being closed for 5 months with a new clean and classic design.

"The Occidental continues to be an essential stop for those visiting DC, because here guests are surrounded by this elegant and sophisticated atmosphere, in the heart of DC and only a half block from the White House, yet we strive to ensure that our food is real. Not fussy or pretentious. We are approachable for everyone and that's why the Occidental is so successful," says Chef.

Scruggs' style and cuisine follows a mantra he learned when he was just starting out: 'KISS' or 'Keep It Simple Scruggs'. Following this ideology, Chef Scruggs incorporates his years of experience and works to elevate simple, fresh and local ingredients, creating exquisite dishes that keep scores of Occidental fans eager for more.

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