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Chef, Dakar NOLA

Serigne Mbaye

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REDEFINING SENIOR DINING

WITH CHEF MATTHEW THOMPSON

FRESH TAKE ON SENIOR MEALS: A CULINARY VISION FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

If you told me 20 years ago that I'd be leading culinary innovation for one of the most exciting companies in senior dining, I probably would've raised an eyebrow—and then asked what was on the menu. My journey into foodservice started like many others: in a bustling kitchen, behind the line, learning the rhythms of a restaurant from the ground up. But over the years, what pulled me in deeper wasn't just the food. It was the people—especially those whose needs are often underserved. That's what led me to Restaura.

At Restaura, we're not just serving meals. We're rewriting the expectations for what senior dining can be. And that starts with recognizing that the audience has changed. Today's seniors aren't the same as the generation before them. They're more health-conscious, tech-savvy, and culinarily curious than ever. They've traveled. They've experienced global flavors. And they expect more than meatloaf Thursdays.

This shift has fundamentally changed how we think about senior dining. No longer is it about "playing it safe" with the menu or assuming limitations. It's about creating an experience that reflects who today's seniors really are: vibrant, engaged individuals who are looking for quality, variety, and dignity in every aspect of their lives—including their meals.

One of the biggest transformations in our approach is how we view nutrition. In the past, nutrition in senior dining was too often reduced to restrictive diets and bland plates. But at Restaura, we believe that food should not only be functional—it should be joyful. We've developed a holistic nutrition-forward philosophy. That means crafting menus that balance macronutrients, accommodate medical conditions, and also



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celebrate flavor. We're seeing a rise in plant-based options, global cuisines, and wellness-boosting ingredients like turmeric, chia, and fermented foods.

We're proud of the menus we're crafting at Restaura—menus that reflect both nutritional needs and culinary excitement. You'll find dishes like grilled salmon with quinoa and citrus herb vinaigrette, turmeric-roasted cauliflower steaks, and pho-inspired chicken noodle soup with ginger and scallions. For breakfast, we're serving avocado toast with poached eggs and smoked paprika, alongside classics like whole grain waffles with seasonal berries. And yes, we still honor comfort favorites—just reimaged. Think mac and cheese

with a protein boost and heart-healthy twists. Every item is designed to nourish the body and satisfy a new generation of seasoned palates.

But we're not just throwing trendy items onto plates. We're listening to our residents. We ask them what they want, what they love, and what food means to them. That feedback becomes part of our culinary roadmap. It's co-creation at its best.

Another critical piece of the transformation puzzle is technology. For years, tech has been an afterthought in senior dining spaces. But that's changing fast—and Restaura is helping lead the charge. Today's seniors are more open to technology than we give them credit

for. Many use tablets, smartwatches, or voice assistants daily. So, we're integrating tech tools that elevate the dining experience rather than complicate it.

Think digital ordering systems that allow residents to customize meals with the swipe of a finger. Smart kitchen tech that ensures consistent quality and portion control. Nutritional dashboards that let families and care teams track wellness in real time. Even virtual culinary demos that connect residents with our chefs and dietitians. Technology isn't replacing the human touch. It's enhancing it—giving seniors more choice, more control, and more connection to their food.

One of the most rewarding aspects of my role is teaching and coaching other foodservice professionals. We hold workshops, lead innovation summits, and provide hands-on training to culinary teams across the country. The message I share is simple: Don't underestimate your diners. Seniors today are more dynamic, diverse, and discerning



Chef Matthew Thompson is a distinguished culinary executive celebrated for his innovative and sustainable approach to menu development and hospitality. With over 25 years in the industry, Chef Matthew has established operational systems that drive meaningful social and economic impact. At Restaura, he is devoted to advancing culinary artistry through creative menus and fostering a team culture focused on dynamic, responsibly sourced dining experiences. Throughout his career, Chef Matthew has championed plant-based diets and sustainable lifestyles, contributing to Food Solutions New England and serving on the Farm to Institution New England advisory council. He is also a sought-after speaker for sustainability-focused organizations such as AASHE, the Culinary Institute of America, and others. Previously, Chef Matthew co-founded Harvest Table Culinary Group, a farm-to-institution dining venture that emphasized regional sourcing and wellness in universities. He spearheaded programs in data-driven food tracking and partnered with the World Resource Institute for climate-forward initiatives. Chef Matthew also held roles in Culinary Operations and Sustainability at Aramark Corporation.

than ever. They deserve food that honors their past while embracing the future. I often say, "Treat senior dining with the same creativity and care you'd bring to any five-star experience." That mindset shift alone can change everything—from how menus are designed to how dining rooms feel.

At Restaura, we see the future of senior dining as personalized, purposeful, and people-driven. **Personalized:** We're developing AI-enhanced meal planning tools that adapt to each resident's dietary needs and flavor preferences. Imagine a menu that evolves with you—not just based on health data, but also your favorite meals and memories. **Purposeful:** Food will become a central part of wellness programming. From "brain-boosting breakfasts" to interactive cooking classes focused on mobility and dexterity, dining will be fully integrated into residents' overall well-being. **People-driven:** We'll keep listening. The voices of our residents, families, and foodservice partners will shape every decision we make.

At the end of the day, food is connection. It's comfort. It's culture. And for seniors, it can be a powerful expression of independence and joy. We're proud to be part of a movement that's transforming senior dining from an obligation into an opportunity—to nourish, to delight, and to celebrate life at every stage. So the next time someone asks me what's cooking in senior dining, I just smile and say, "Everything."

