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SUSAN STURMAN

ACADEMIE OPUS CASEUS,
SAINT-HAON-LE-CHÂTEL, FRANCE

NAME: Susan Sturman

COMPANY:
Academie Opus Caseus,
Saint-Haon-le-Châtel, France

TITLE: Partner

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:
Helping to create the first Certified Cheese Professional program; assistant director, Ecole Ritz-Escoffier, Paris; partner, Academie Opus Caseus

PERSONAL: Sturman grew up in Long Island, NY and currently lives in Brookline, MA. She's been married to her husband, David, for 33 years. Her daughter, Sarah, 17, is going to American University of Paris, and she has a 14-year-old son, Nicholas.

HOBBIES: Cooking, reading, entertaining, gardening.

BEST ADVICE: "People should be open to opportunity," says Sturman. "Know yourself, including your strengths and weaknesses, and be able to jump and contribute. Also, keep yourself squarely driven by service."

Susan Sturman describes her career as a winding route that, while unpredictable, made sense in hindsight.

In testament to her dedication in developing the careers of cheese professionals around the world, Sturman is being honored with a 2015 Deli Business People's Award.

The biggest influence on her love of food was Sturman's mother, who she describes as a wonderful cook.

"She loved to entertain and had a great reputation as a cook, but she was very territorial about her kitchen, so she didn't teach me cooking, but rather the joy and satisfaction of preparing and sharing meals with friends," she says.

Sturman's food industry career didn't start right away. After graduating from Boston University with a major in public relations and minor in organizational communications, she worked in corporate public relations, advertising, employee activities, sales and catering.

"I worked with customers, developed menus, and ran on-site events, then moved to the kitchen," says Sturman. "Usually, people move from the back-of-the-house to management, not the other way around."

When Sturman's husband completed graduate school in Boston, the couple decided to move to France.

She studied cooking at the Ecole Ritz Escoffier at the Ritz Paris, then worked as a sous chef in a Paris restaurant. Her six years in Paris also included jobs as a gastronomic tour guide and menu translator, before she was asked to serve as assistant director of the Ritz Escoffier school. This is where Sturman's education and love of cheese was born.

"One of my responsibilities was learning about cheese, and I discovered the more you teach, the more you learn," she says.

She opened a catering company, before moving back to the states and starting a family. After a four-year hiatus, Sturman launched a small business teaching custom-designed cooking classes to small groups for the next seven years. At the same time she started teaching about cheese to private and corporate groups, eventually teaching regularly at New York City's Murray's Cheese in Greenwich Village.

Inquiring about American cheeses at a local Slow Food event, she was introduced to the American Cheese Society. After attending an ACS conference, her cheese career took off.

"During one of my first ACS conferences, I went to a session debating the need for cheese professional certification, and it created an ad hoc breakout session that was the beginning of the society's Certified Cheese Professional Program," says Sturman.

She was tapped to chair the committee, and the project eventually involved more than 100 ACS cheese professionals.

Although it took seven years to come to fruition, the first Certified Cheese Professional Exam was created in 2012. More than 150 people signed up to get certified, proof that the certification was warranted. This year, more than 300 candidates will take the exam.

"We were working with consultants who said that in the 25-plus years of giving credential exams, they have never seen such a successful program," says Sturman.

She is proud to be a part of an idea that has experienced great success and helped the ACS achieve a new level of prominence in the industry.

"We spent time paving the way, making sure this was something worth doing, and it was well worth the effort," says Sturman.

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