

In a Class by Themselves

These CBHS grads have more in common than just school ties.

by HANNAH SAYLE

EVERYONE KNOWS MEMPHIS is a small town in big-city clothing. But to boast five of Memphis' most prominent young chefs in one high school class goes beyond small town and moves into serendipitous territory.

The 1998 Christian Brothers High School graduating class gave rise to a new wave of local restaurateurs: Chefs Andy Ticer and Michael Hudman of Andrew Michael Italian Kitchen; Ryan Trimm, co-owner and head chef of Sweet Grass and Sweet Grass Next Door; Jackson Kramer, executive chef of Interim; and Taylor Berger, founder of YoLo.

By all accounts, the young men knew each other, but weren't particularly close friends. That is, of course, with the exception of Ticer and Hudman.

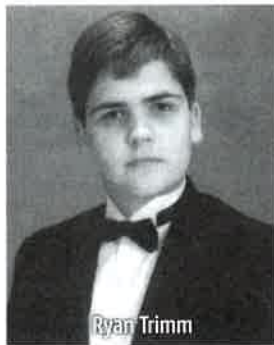
"Me and Mikey met in the sixth grade. We played sports against each other and we were rivals. That's how we actually met," says Ticer. "Then when I met his family and saw that he had a big Italian family and that they did big dinners on Sunday just like [my family]



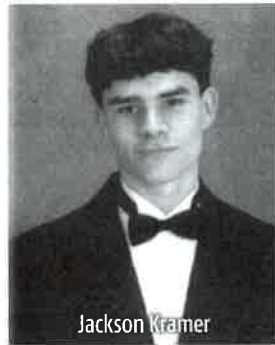
Andrew Ticer



Michael Hudman



Ryan Trimm



Jackson Kramer



Taylor Berger

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did, it opened my eyes up. In our freshman year in high school we were talking about how you can't get good Italian anywhere in the city and we decided then that we would open a restaurant. We used to write notes about what the bar and restaurant would look like. And this was when we were, like, 15 years old."

Unlike Ticer and Hudman, Trimm was not so sure where his career path would lead.

"I was an English major and had every intention of going to law school when I graduated," says Trimm. "But then during my senior year I worked at the restaurant called 208 [in Oxford]. I enjoyed working there and realized I really liked cooking and really didn't want to be a lawyer."

And while Andrew Michael Italian Kitchen was always slated for a spot in Memphis' restaurant scene, Trimm's Sweet Grass may have ended up in Chicago or Washington, D.C., as Trimm explored opportunities there. But then he returned to Memphis to marry his high school sweetheart.

"I originally had no intention of moving back to

Memphis," he says. "My original intention didn't work out, but this turned out to be perfect."

Taylor Berger, who founded YoLo Frozen Yogurt in Memphis two years ago and has since expanded his business into North Carolina and Kentucky, was less interested in food during his time at CBHS than he was in starting his own business.

"I took a business class and had to write a proposal for a business," says Berger, "and I came up with an oil change service that would come to you. A couple of years later I saw a billboard for what was essentially my business idea. The fact that somebody else did what was my original idea really got me going. Later, when I went to Rhodes, I wanted to start a coffee shop where Café Eclectic is now, and then Café Eclectic opened. Again I felt like someone had beat me to it. So when I got the idea for YoLo, I knew I would regret it if I didn't go ahead and get it done."

In another twist of fate, Berger has partnered up

with a sixth 1998 CBHS graduate, J.D. Sledd, who owns a number of Pronto Pup trailers in town. The two are working on a new restaurant concept for the long-dormant Chicago Pizza Factory on Madison.

Jackson Kramer has spent his post-CBHS years on a fast track to the kitchen. He knew in high school that he loved food and cooking, and when he saw his guidance counselor to discuss school and career options, he brought up culinary school.

"I knew I didn't want a 9 to 5 office job," says Kramer. "I didn't want anything to do with that. But almost 12 years ago, culinary school wasn't as big as it is now, so [the guidance counselors] didn't have anything to give me."

Kramer made his own way, cooking at Café Society, and then in Portland, Oregon; Grayton Beach, Florida; and Asheville, North Carolina.

"I love traveling and living other places," says Kramer, who's now executive chef at Interim. "But Memphis is my home. It was great to come back and be a part of these young chefs here making good food." **M**