



Mechanical Engineering
Academy of Distinguished Alumni

Christopher J. Pappas

Distinguished Mechanical Engineer, 2012

BSME, The University of Texas at Austin, 1970

CEO

Pappas Restaurants, Inc.

Christopher J. Pappas was raised in Houston, Texas around his family's restaurant equipment business. As a kid, he loved working with his hands, building go-karts, motorbikes and together, with his brothers, restoring a 1931 Model "A" Ford that they then proudly drove to school. Chris appreciated the inherent longevity and visible nature of mechanical systems, and this in turn led him to major in mechanical engineering. It has served as a foundation of his success throughout his career.

Chris chose to pay for his own education working for the Southwestern Company (est. 1865), which employs college students to sell books door-to-door. It was challenging work, and for three years his summers were spent knocking on doors, sunup to sundown, giving over 5,000 family presentations, learning about people and the importance of persistence. His most enduring lesson was how to change a "no" into a "yes!"

After graduating from The University of Texas at Austin in 1970, IBM hired Chris as a mechanical engineer in Austin. As part of the Office Products Division, he used his training to help refine one of IBM's earliest word processors, which combined existing typewriter technology and a computer.

Chris watched his father and uncles work together as a team to transition the family business from a restaurant equipment provider to a chain of diners. This reinforced a dream in him and at 18 years of age, he knew that someday he wanted to use his and his brothers' talents to succeed in a family business. The dream began to take shape when Chris left his mechanical engineering position at IBM and started working in one of his family's restaurants, learning the

business from the ground up as a short order cook in 1974.

Chris and his brothers went on to open The Strawberry Patch in 1976. From that time, Pappas Restaurants has expanded to nine brands, including Pappasito's, Pappadeaux, Pappas Bar-B-Q, and Pappas Bros. Steakhouse. The Pappas brothers built the business with core values of plentiful food, reasonable prices, consistent service and happy guests. These values became the hallmark of Pappas Restaurants. If a guest felt something wasn't right, it was always to be addressed before they left the restaurant.

Today, Chris uses his engineering background for restaurant layout, custom equipment fabrication and kitchen design in the family's 100+ locations. This expertise has also enabled the company to donate kitchen design services and equipment to groups including the YMCA, Boy Scouts of America, Star of Hope, Houston Food Bank, Kids Meals, the Houston Greek Orthodox Church and many others, allowing them to further serve those in need.

Chris feels fortunate to have been shaped by his education and degree in engineering. One of Chris's greatest joys has been to see the personal growth of thousands of individuals who have made a career with Pappas Restaurants over the years.

Chris and Maria, his wife of over 35 years, still live in Houston, and have five adult children who have also grown up in the family business. While raising his kids, Chris inscribed this well-known quote on their bedroom mirrors: "If it is to be, it is up to me." (William H. Johnson). It has served them well.