

RUTGERSNew Jersey Agricultural
Experiment Station

Carl Scialfa: Branchburg Township Health Department Registered Environmental Health Specialist

As both a chef and an REHS, Scialfa has been on both side of public health inspection.

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Carl Scialfa,
REHS

A Passion for Food

Carl Scialfa may be doing food inspections now as a Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS), but he began his career trying to pass them. “I had worked with health inspectors in business for many years, and they were sort of the enemy,” he jokes, recalling the more than thirty years he spent working in the food service industry before becoming a health inspector with the Branchburg Township Health Department in 2005. Scialfa’s professional and educational background consists entirely of expertise in the food service industry, which he calls “the passion of my career.” He has several degrees in restaurant and food management, a chef’s training certificate, and he has worked as both a caterer and a chef. Scialfa always found his work with food satisfying and rewarding, especially since it led him to his new career in public health.



Scialfa’s work as an REHS takes him beyond food management into many different areas of public health and

The Other Side of Health Inspection

Scialfa first considered becoming a health inspector in 2004 while he was working as a cook with Chartwells School Dining Services in Edison, NJ. There, he met an REHS whose excitement for the job got him contemplating a career change. After learning more about what an REHS does, he realized, “I could get a successful career out of this and be gainfully employed, be happy, make a good salary, and feel good about what I do.” By adding public health training to the food safety training he already had, Scialfa felt confident he could learn what he needed to get a good environmental health job.

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Scialfa attended EPH in 2004. “My experience was really rich,” he says.

Since receiving his REHS license, Scialfa became one of the first Certified Retail Food Specialist in New Jersey.

Scialfa will return to his Rutgers roots as an instructor in the EPH course this summer. “The class was the best experience I ever had,” he says.

The REHS told Scialfa about Environment and Public Health (EPH), a course run by Rutgers University’s Office of Continuing Professional Education (OCPE). The course runs for seven weeks during the summer, and is followed by a 200-hour internship at a local health department. Through the course and the internship, students are given environmental health training they need to help prepare them for the NJ REHS exam and to find an REHS job once they obtain their NJ REHS license. Scialfa attended the course during the summer of 2004 and remembers it fondly. “My experience was really rich,” he says. He and his classmates quickly formed study groups to help each other keep up with the challenging workload, and he continues to credit them with his success. The group dynamic lasted even longer than the class did, and Scialfa continued to work with his fellow students throughout the months leading up to the state exam.

Reaping His Rewards

Perhaps the most valuable thing Scialfa took away from the EPH course is his current job with the Branchburg Township Health Department. Toward the end of the course, Jim Morris, an associate director with OCPE, approached Scialfa about a job opportunity in Branchburg. With Morris’ recommendation, and on the condition that he passed the NJ REHS exam, Scialfa was able to complete the EPH course employed.

At the end of 2007, after Scialfa had been working at Branchburg for nearly three years, the New Jersey Department of Health implemented a standardization program to ensure that the methods by which health inspectors examine retail food establishments are uniform and consistent. Due to his background in food services, Scialfa was the first REHS in New Jersey to become standardized, and he was then selected to become a Certified Retail Food Specialist, enabling him to train other inspectors to become standardization trainers. Education has always been important to Scialfa, and it shows: “2008 has been a record year for me,” he says. “I have been educating our licensees so that they change and they learn why they have to change.” With Scialfa’s help, more and more inspectors throughout the state are becoming standardized, making for safer food handling, preparation, and production.

Coming Full Circle

Scialfa put a lot of hard work into his career change, and it has certainly paid off. “I think it was a great decision. I certainly couldn’t have planned it with an outcome like this,” he says. “The [EPH] class was the best experience I ever had.” In just a few years, Scialfa has gone from working with food to studying subjects completely unrelated to food management, such as septic systems and animal control regulations, and now he is back to being a food specialist. In fact, he will return to EPH next summer as an instructor to talk to prospective REHSs about standardization.