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THE MIGHTY QUINN'S WORLD MISSION

He came, he spoke, he inspired.

Michael Quinn MBE is continuing to repay the industry that gave him so much, before taking it all away.

The acclaimed and respected Michelin Star awarded chef, who whilst at the top of his career at The Ritz Hotel in London, through stress, pressure of work and unsociable hours, turned to alcohol. He now delivers his message of support, hope and courage around the world to those who might find themselves in a similar situation.

At the age of 49, having lost practically everything he valued in life, Michael found himself with end-stage liver failure, receiving what Catholics commonly refer to as the "Last Rites". Then, something clicked.

"It was like an instant realisation", Michael says. "I knew at that moment that I no longer needed to drink. I was free from the obsession and compulsion that alcohol brought into my life for so long".

During his recovery, "The Mighty Quinn", as he had come to be known, attended 90 Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in 90 days; sometimes going twice a day.

"I saw how far my friends in AA had come and what they had managed to set up for their lives and I wanted that" Michael says. "I followed what they had done, they showed me the way and now is my time to give that back".

And give back he has done.

Five years after he started out on the road to recovery Michael created the UK's well known Ark Foundation, a charity taking awareness of alcohol and drug problems to Britain's catering colleges.

In the Ark's first year, Michael told his story to students at 13 British colleges. In 2007, the foundation, which is part of Britain's Hospitality Action group and funded by the hospitality industry, ran seminars at 300 colleges, in front of 20,000 students.

Following that phenomenal success Michael decided to take his message to the world and Ark Global was set up to meet this end.

After a call to old friend, and ex-student, Roy Southworth, Principal Lecturer at Swan TAFE in Perth, Western Australia, Michael's mission was penned out and it was simple – spread the word and aim to help as many people as possible.

In what has now become his new full-time job, Michael began his work delivering international seminars, in Perth, in June.

Highly regarded as one of the best training providers for the hospitality industry in Western Australia, Swan TAFE offered the perfect opportunity for Michael to reach the chef's of tomorrow, as well as lecturers and those already in the industry.

Interest in the Mighty Quinn's two-week visit was instantaneous, sparking various radio and newspaper interviews with the likes of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in Perth.

On arrival to 'the most isolated city in the world' Michael was whisked away to fellow TAFEWA College, West Coast, in the northern suburbs. There, he met with the Executive Managing Director of Hospitality, Patrick O'Brien, lecturers, and students, who were busily competing in heats for the Apprentice of the Year award.

"Michael's appearance at the heats drew stares and gasps from the crowd" explains Roy.

"The lecturers, students and industry representatives knew he would be in attendance but his actual arrival was like something I'd expect to see when the Pussycat Dolls walked into a tweens birthday party"!

The first of Michael's seminars across the Indian Ocean was delivered to a group of wide-eyed full-time hospitality students (and staff) at West Coast's Hospitality Academy just days after his arrival and, in the days that followed, Michael gave his seminar to over 550 students and staff at both "home" College, Swan TAFE and fellow college Challenger, in the state's port suburb of Fremantle.

Industry seminars at Burswood Entertainment Complex were also a huge success.

Perth's 24 hour casino and nightlife venue boasts 15 restaurants, bars, clubs and cafés, two hotels with over 700 guest rooms, convention facilities, day spa and a world-class 18-hole golf course, all spread over 100 hectares of lush manicured gardens.

Tracey Ashman, Apprentice and Trainee Manager at Burswood, said her staff found Michael both truthful and very upfront about the difficulties he had once faced.

"Michael captured the attention of this audience from the moment he started to talk," Tracey said.

"He was, in a strange way, entertaining and most definitely engaging. The students could not stop talking about him for the rest of the day".

Michael's visit culminated with the "official" launch of Ark Global, at Swan TAFE's Bentley Hospitality Institute on June 17.

Attended by WA's peak industry bodies, their employees and TAFEWA colleges, every guest was greeted by Roy Southworth and The Mighty Quinn as they entered the room, before being offered canapés which included sushi served in lacquer boxes, parsnip soup in small glasses and pre-dinner drinks, in the restaurant's lounge area.

A mouth-watering feast was to follow, showcasing the best of Western Australia's produce, including fresh Bluewater Crab, Mourambine Lamb and a fantastic assortment of cheeses, prepared and served by hospitality lecturers and students from Swan TAFE. All food and wine for the evening was graciously donated by a range of Western Australian producers and suppliers.

Before the crowd had a chance to roll out of their chairs Michael addressed them with what can only be described as a life changing speech.

"I had my first drink at 18 and it felt like the missing piece of the puzzle," he said. "In the early days, alcohol helped me to handle life, it was my emotional security blanket and it gave me the feeling of belonging that I desired".

It was only a matter of time before the downside happened though.

"All drug addicts cross the invisible line a long time before they realise it, and I was no different; once I began to deteriorate, I went downhill very quickly but, my pride and ego kept me from asking for help.

"My life, the life of an alcoholic, was built on negativity and fear – the fear of rejection, failure and even success. I became a professional conman, lying to stay ahead of the game". Michael continued, "It's a long, hard path to recovery but it can be done and, the rewards speak for themselves.

"The best thing that has happened in my life is the rebuilding of my relationship with my sons. I love them so very much. I look back at that time now and it is like looking at a different person. I'm the real Michael Quinn now."

At the end of his speech applause erupted and guests were on their feet. It was like everyone had just fully realised the extent of this one man's vision.

There's no doubting Swan TAFE's platform for the launch of Ark Global in Australia. Thanks to the Catering Institute of Australia (WA) and Swan TAFE's Managing Director, Mr Wayne Collyer, the word has spread amongst TAFE colleges Australia-wide.

Industry bodies, such as the Australian Culinary Federation, are waiting for his arrival in Adelaide, Canberra, Cairns, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane with baited breath - they're ready and willing to help.

Michael will also be introduced and have the chance to speak at Australia's largest trade competition, WorldSkills, to be held Sydney, this month.

"It might be that, through its seminars, Ark Global can just plant a seed," Michael says, "so that years later someone who heard me speak will think 'that short, fat bastard was right' and get some help."

We sure think its mission accomplished. He *has* conquered.

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