Antonio Peralta had worked for the city of Chicago for more than 20 years. But in the back of his mind, he had a dream that time could not beat down.

“I have always wanted to be a cook and caterer,” he says. “I have warm memories of my family in the kitchen, and I wanted to share that passion with everyone.”

Though he had the desire and persistence, Peralta knew he needed training and education to make his lifelong dream come true. A resident of Highland, he turned to Ivy Tech Community College.

“I was pleasantly surprised at how reasonable the cost was compared to other schools in Chicago and Northwest Indiana,” he says. “Especially when I learned about the extensive hands-on training and the fact that Ivy Tech’s program is certified by the American Culinary Federation Accrediting Commission.”

Peralta began attending classes at the East Chicago location on Columbus Drive, which is part of the Lake County campus. Considering he was working full time and commuting to Chicago, he was limited in the number of courses he could take per semester to maximize his opportunity.

For six years, Peralta persisted. “I love the hands-on training and the state-of-the-art kitchens that Ivy Tech provides,” he says. “I also love that the program focuses on culinary basics that you need in order to professionally cook and cater.”

While he worked and attended school, Peralta began building his new career. Ivy Tech gave him the opportunity to bring his grill to school events in Gary, Valparaiso, and East Chicago. He shared his barbecue and burger creations with as many as 500 grateful students and faculty.

“Ivy Tech provides every opportunity you need to realize your dream,” he says. “You just have to roll up your sleeves and get to work.”

In 2014, Peralta incorporated his business, Tender Bone BBQ & Catering, and began to set up at various outdoor events and markets. Retiring in September 2016 from the Chicago Transit Authority, Peralta became a full-time cook and caterer. He graduated from Ivy Tech’s Culinary Arts program in 2018. He acquired a “big-boy” grill that he takes to his numerous venues. A food truck is a work-in-progress.

“Even though I graduated, I stay in touch with Ivy Tech faculty and students,” Peralta says. “I’m proud of my accomplishments, and I am grateful for how Ivy Tech supported me every step of the way.”

Those who graduate from the Hospitality Administration, Culinary Arts program will have the knowledge to excel in the hospitality industry and the ability to begin working above an entry-level position. The Associate of Science degree prepares students to transfer to a variety of state universities to pursue a bachelor’s degree.

Baking & Pastry Arts graduates have been trained in American Culinary Federation Standards for pastry certification and to work in restaurants, hotels and bakeries, among other businesses.

Culinary Arts graduates work as kitchen managers or sauté cooks, sous chefs and culinary specialists. Ivy Tech’s educational kitchen enables instructors to prepare students to excel in the field.

The Ivy Tech Culinary Arts program remains 75 percent lower in cost than other culinary schools in the Region yet offers the same hands-on training and is nationally accredited by the American Culinary Federation Accrediting Commission.

Transfer Partners: Ivy Tech has several hospitality program partnerships with four-year college programs, including Purdue Northwest, Ball State and Indiana State.

To learn more about Ivy Tech’s Pathway to Success to a rewarding career, contact the college at www.ivytech.edu or call 888-IVY-LINE (489-5463).