Mehmet Aksel

MSA

“ I saw an opportunity to create a state-of-the-art culinary institute, while curbing unemployment. ”

COUNTRY	Turkey
INDUSTRY	Prof. Services
EMPLOYEES	48
YEAR SELECTED	2010
WEBSITE	www.msa.tc

COMPANY SNAPSHOT

Mehmet is a lot of things — college drop-out, professional race-car driver, serial entrepreneur — but a cook is not one of them. A man of fine tastes, Mehmet's limitations in the kitchen led him to see early on that there was a dearth of highly-skilled restaurateurs and chefs in his native Turkey. In 2004, he started Mutfak Sanatlari Akademisi (MSA) to fill this gap, and currently serves as the CEO.

MSA has since grown into a state-of-the-art culinary institute and the only cooking school in Turkey with both international and domestic accreditation. MSA graduates approximately 600 culinary professionals each year. With Mehmet at the helm, a world-recognized culinary school could be the beginning of a vocational education empire that helps Turkey address its 14% unemployment rate and growing youth demographic.

Mehmet has taken a winding road to get where he is today. After dropping out of the University of Michigan in 1987, he returned to his native Istanbul to compete professionally in the equestrian and automotive racing circuits. As a professional driver for both Formula 3 and Rally & Touring, he won 100 national and international prizes between 1991 and 2001. He also joined the Turkish National Equestrian Team and won nearly 300 prizes, ultimately becoming the Balkan Champion in 1986. In 1991, he opened a Peugeot dealership with money earned from competitions and support from his family. But when Peugeot set up a condition in 1994 that all of their dealerships had to include a "car service department," Mehmet closed the down the dealership and became a restaurateur, opening the Café Turc and Brasserie D'oeuf restaurants. After nearly a decade in the restaurant business, he realized that he could have a greater impact on Turkey's food and beverage industry if he got involved earlier in the service/supply chain. He sold his restaurants and opened MSA to train the next generation of Turkey's top chefs and restaurant owners.