

The Eating...Our Words 100: Tracy Vaught, Owner of Backstreet Cafe and Hugo's

By **Brittanie Shey**

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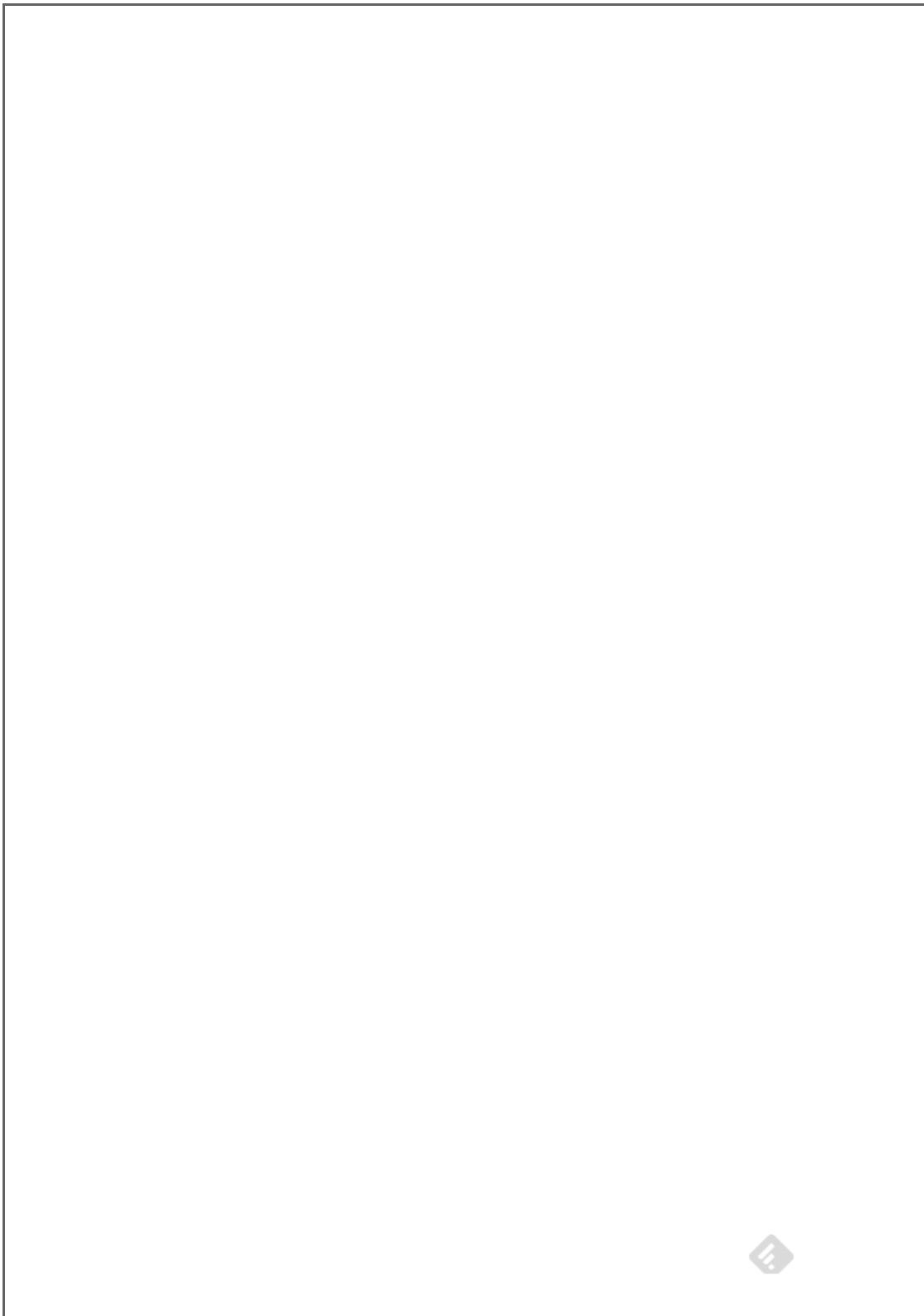




Photo courtesy of Patterson & Murphy

What she does:

Tracy Vaught is the owner of [Hugo's](#) and [Backstreet Cafe](#) and a partner at [Prego](#) and [Trevisio](#).

""I do all the planning, train managers, set all the standards for the restaurants, design menus," says Vaught. "Investments and charitable giving. I am the one who has political involvement --I

try to involve myself with the restaurant associations at the state and local level."

Why she likes it:

Vaught wasn't always a restaurateur. In a past life, she worked as a geologist, and until opening her first restaurant, had no experience in the food business.

"I'm interested in food," Vaught says, "and it allows me to be involved in food on a daily basis. It's a social job. I grew up with family members who were good cooks. I used to hang out in the kitchen. I just have really good memories of that."

"I opened Backstreet in 1983," she recalls. "It was a leap. I don't think I knew it at the time, but it was."

What inspires her:

Vaught said that as a kid, "it always seemed like a luxury, going out to eat." But her perspective changed a few years ago.

"During Ike, I really realized how people didn't prepare," Vaught remembers. "The stores were sold out, no one had electricity. Hugo's opened early -- we had people coming to the door because they were hungry -- they really didn't know how to cook, or couldn't. It made me realize restaurants aren't a luxury any more. People depend on us."

Her employees also inspire her, she said.

"In the restaurant business, we have a lot of workers with very little education or work experience. It's very inspiring to watch someone buy their first car or buy their first home after all that hard work. It's inspiring to see that growth."

If not this, then what?

Working in the restaurant business also lets Vaught pursue her other interest: real estate. Vaught says she'd probably either still be a geologist, or be working in real estate somehow.

"I'm interested in land and its values," she says. "I love the idea of redoing homes. There is a home that's been in my family since 1935 that we're slowly renovating."

If not here, then where?

"Someplace pretty laid back," she said. "Maybe Austin? A relaxed environment with not very much pressure."

What's next?

Vaught just ended a successful three-year relationship with Urban Harvest that required her cooks to get up very early on Saturday mornings to serve food at the farmer's market. She's been looking for other opportunities to do some charitable work, and she thinks she's found it.

"Each restaurant is getting involved in a culinary school in town," Vaught says. "That seems like the natural thing to do."

She also plans to take a trip down to Mexico with chefs Hugo Ortega (her husband, and co-owner of Hugo's) and his brother Ruben (also a chef at the restaurant) for some continuing education.

"We are exploring some opportunities for our cooks. We have a lot of dreams," she said. "I just wish there was unlimited money and time."

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