

To serve and polish

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Presented by



Nathan Denette/National Post

Six people have recently become the first graduates of Charles MacPherson Academy for Butlers and Household Managers, which opened this year in Toronto. For those who dream of buffing stemware and managing the estates of the rich and famous, the academy's next eight-week session begins on Feb. 9 at a cost of \$10,000. The Post's Melissa Leong spoke to the academy's founder, former George Eaton family butler Charles MacPherson, about the school and how it is faring in these turbulent economic

times.

Q Is the troubled economy affecting the demand for butlers?

A The uber wealthy person is someone who has US\$50-million in net assets. That market is not affected. Even though they are losing several millions, in the grand scheme of their lifestyle, they're still spending. The high net worth individual who is in the \$10-million category, they also are still spending on a smaller scale. Maybe you'll fly first class as opposed to the private jet. You might not buy the new Monet for the living room but if you have two or three homes around the world, someone still has to manage them. That's why there's still a demand despite the economic downturn. It's the person with one or two housekeepers who are being very price-sensitive. Q The global financial crisis has led to an increase in interested applicants to your school. Why is that?

A The people who are applying for the school today are very high-level proficient people who have been affected by the downturn. They're from the banking industry. They're from the corporate world and all of a sudden they've lost their jobs. It allows them to re-examine their lives. In the last course in Toronto, we had a serious engineer at the top of her field in the automotive industry. She left the industry and she's gone into upper household management.

Q What would I learn at the academy?

A If you want to be a butler, you have to be able to know how to correctly set a table, how to pack a suitcase or, how do you deal with the ketchup stains on the six-year-old son's favourite T-shirt. To become the uber butler or the household master, you need to be able to understand practical skills.

We're the only school in the world that has built a household management laboratory: In ironing class, everyone has an iron and an ironing board. Or for example in tea-making class, everyone has a tea kettle and a tea pot.

Q I stain my laundry pink. What other skills would make me a good manservant (womanservant)?

A The job needs someone who is organized, who can anticipate, who can be discreet and who has a desire to serve. An ability to anticipate your employer's needs is the best thing. When your employer comes off the tennis court and they're hot and sweaty, you [should] have a fresh, cold drink ready. Q My mother used to say that we should pay her for being our butler. How much does a butler make?

A \$40,000 to \$175,000 and up. Q What kind of emergency would a butler have to deal with?

A Emergencies can be anything from a foot of water in the basement to it's Christmas Eve and the family's away and you realize one of the Christmas presents is sitting at the house in the city and you need to be able to drive two hours north to get it there. Ultimately you care about these people because you're in their private lives. Q If I could be anyone's butler, I'd be Batman's. Think of the perks.

A How else, like in my case, would you have the honour of meeting royalty or flying across the ocean in a private jet with a famous movie star? Little Charles who was born in Thunder Bay, whoever thought he would sit down with the prime minister of Canada, [or] with royalty from the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates.

IMPORTANT TALENTS

HOW TO PACK A SUITCASE - Pack heavy items such as shoes and toiletry kits before the more delicate ones. - Place them along the suitcase's spine to balance the weight at the bottom. - Use lots of tissue paper to: line the suitcase, place between each layer of clothing, wrap around shoe heels, stuff into jacket sleeves. - When packing women's luggage, bundle clean lingerie in white tissue paper tied with a colourful ribbon for easy identification. - Line the bottom of the suitcase with trousers, letting the legs hang over the outside edge. Then pack the rest of the travel gear with lighter articles on top. Wrap the trouser legs over the other items. - Stuff socks and belts into shoes to save space.

FOLDING TOWELS

1. Start by laying the towel fully open on a flat surface.
2. Note: Make sure the towel tag is face up .
3. Fold the side closest to you one-third of the way over.

4. Fold the remaining side of the towel towards you. You have now created a towel folded with three layers. 5 Now fold the towel in half (lengthwise).

Source: Charles MacPherson Associates

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