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*Patti Anastasia
Anastasia's Table
Personal Chef Service*

Personal Chef

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Personal Chef welcomes any articles, manuscripts, tips, hints, photographs, recipes and ideas from our readers. We appreciate all submissions. Please include name, address and phone number. Send your contributions to:

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Getting it Together

**Tis the Season to be Joyful and
Thankful**

The thought of the upcoming holidays overwhelms a lot of people. They think they must find the perfect gifts, be the perfect hostess, decorate elegantly, and perhaps do some traveling. Personal chefs stress out over providing clients with what they perceive to be perfect-looking and perfect-tasting foods.

Clients request special items and look to their personal chefs to cater memorable holiday dinners. You search for the perfect client gifts and on top of this you have your own family celebrations to orchestrate. Help! Who can keep pace with it all?

As Anne Alexander, a past editor of Guideposts magazine says, "We search for all those external signs of happiness and joy, forgetting the underlying truth – we can't make others happy or even celebrate the joy of the season ourselves, unless we really feel it inside."

So, before the holiday rush begins, plan some private time. Get up earlier and take a quiet walk. Give yourself permission to have a peaceful morning to focus on all the goodness in your life and the reasons you have to be thankful. Joy is a choice.

Among the goodness in my life and my reasons for being thankful are the opportunity to be involved with personal chefs and the Personal Chef magazine. What a blessing these are!

My request to you this holiday season is that you look for occasions in your own life which bring you a sense of joy and make you want to celebrate.

Thankfully yours,

Carol Anderson

Carol Anderson, editor
pceditor@uspca.com



Featured Chef



Patti Anastasia

“Somewhere in the back of my mind was a plan to become a personal chef.”

Patti Anastasia: People Pay Me to ‘Play’ In Their Kitchens!

By Carol Anderson, Editor

“I love that people let me play in their kitchens,” says Personal Chef Patti Anastasia. And she loves all the other aspects of her new career as well.

Serving families by preparing delicious healthy meals is quite a change from being an information architect and technical writer at an Internet software company. Families she serves can thank the company that outsourced Patti’s work, leaving her without a regular job.

Why become a personal chef? Patti says, “Somewhere in the back of my mind was a plan to become a personal chef. I had read about that career in cooking magazines and thought it would be a perfect retirement career.”

Patti’s early ‘culinary training’

It was her mom that started Patti in the kitchen. “Some of my earliest memories are of cooking with my mom,” said Patti. “She taught me how to follow recipes, but more importantly, she taught me that recipes are guidelines. I think that was her biggest gift to me.”

As a result, Patti admits that she is an improvisational cook, and she jokes that, ‘I am genetically incapable of precisely following a recipe.’ She does just fine with most cooking projects, but her ‘affliction’ gets in the way when baking. “I’m not interested enough in baking to learn the chemistry of it so that I can successfully experiment. I’ve learned that I need to follow a recipe exactly to be successful in baking.”

Patti unknowingly started personal chef training long before she knew what a personal chef was. In the early 1990s, she and her husband worked at jobs that were over an hour away from home. They both got home late and it quickly became apparent that something had to be done to get dinner on the table during the week.

The problem was solved when they started planning make-ahead meals for the freezer. Once a month they did a huge shopping trip and then Patti spent part of the weekend cooking and freezing meals. Husband Tom doesn’t really like to cook, but while Patti was cooking, he’d come into the kitchen and wash the dishes that were piling up. Main dishes were prepared and frozen. When they got home from work, they made quick starch and veggie sides to go with them. “I felt well-trained in the cooking part of personal cheffing because, by the time I decided to become a personal chef, I had been acting as my own for years. I also learned what it was like to have a personal chef.”

Changing careers

With thoughts of being a personal chef distracting her from thinking of anything else, she took the plunge. She decided to give it her all - and two years - to make it a success. Her husband, family, friends, and former coworkers cheered her on. They helped by listening to her and letting Patti bounce ideas off them. One friend who had changed careers was a role model; sharing her experiences and helping find small business networking opportunities.

Patti says, "Everyone loves seeing someone pursue a dream job. My family and friends didn't always understand what it was that I was undertaking, but they encouraged me to take the risk. There are always a few naysayers, but the people who were close to me supported and encouraged me."

Patti's start-up experiences

After trying to come up with a business name, Tom reminded Patti that everyone seems to remember her last name. So Anastasia's Table became the name of her business with the tagline of 'Great meals and the time to enjoy them!' "In addition to providing my clients with great food, the time that I create for them is important," says Patti. "My clients call me because they don't have the time to prepare the types of meals that they want to enjoy."

She had a name and determination, but Patti admits she didn't know anything about starting and running a business – or about marketing. She knew how to cook and how to package and freeze meals. Patti knew who her clients were, but she didn't know how to find them. "I wanted to believe that I could 'build it and they would come' – but that only works in the movie *Field of Dreams*." Patti admits that she's not a naturally gregarious person. "It was hard for me to market my business at first, and I had to learn how to build a network."

Landing her first client was easy – it was the lawyer she worked with when forming her business. Patti explained, "When I told him that I was starting a personal chef service, he and his wife had just started looking for a personal chef. They became my first client."

Initially business was slow, but Patti continued to pour a lot of effort into growing her network. Subsequent clients came from referrals from networking partners; others were people with whom either Patti or her husband had worked. Finally business started to come her way. Then Patti says, "It was like someone turned on a fire hose. I went from having a small amount of steady business to doubling and then tripling my business in two months." This success caused Patti to rethink many of the processes she was using because they didn't scale adequately to meet her new volume.

Old Career vs. New Career

"My life as a personal chef is less structured, which most of the time is a good thing," said Patti. "I love that people pay me to play in their kitchens."

Patti also likes choosing her own work schedule and with whom she works. She says, "I love that what I do makes a difference in people's lives. It doesn't make a difference in a 'save the world' sort of way, but rather in a 'save a family's sanity' sort of way."

She was surprised to see how her technical writing skills transferred to running a personal chef service. "Tech writing is all about audience and needs analysis," Patti said. "So is personal cheffing. Technical writing is also all about research and I satisfy my love of research working with special diet clients."

Her computer skills come in very handy. In fact, Patti wonders how anyone can run a business without computer skills. The last seven years of her tech writing career were spent working on web-based documentation, so Patti had the skills needed to create a web site for Anastasia's Table. And she's used computer skills to automate repetitive tasks. For example, all of her customized client paperwork is created using Excel/Word mail merges.

Marketing and Pricing

Successful marketing has been accomplished with an online presence, networking, and asking clients for referrals. "When I landed my first client right off the bat, I thought more clients would come as easily – but they didn't," Patti says. "It wasn't until I embraced networking, that I was able to grow my business. But it takes time to build a network, and that can be discouraging. I remember pleading with my phone to ring, then being terrified when it did ring." She attended as many small business networking meetings and events as possible. As her business grew, there was less time to attend meetings, requiring her to network on a less formal basis (i.e., meeting other small business owners for lunch or dinner). Additionally, in the early days, Patti bought ads in some local newspapers. However, the only calls she got were from other publications wanting her to advertise in their publications.

Here's how Patti describes her current marketing efforts: "I now put a lot of my marketing effort into online promotion of my web site. I've always had a web site, but in the past few years, I've worked at maintaining a high search engine ranking. Blogging has made a big impact on my website's search engine ranking. My blog is integrated into my web site, so search engine crawlers find new content on my web site. The blog drives traffic to my web site. I use Twitter and Facebook to promote my business. I enjoy doing these things and they also make a measurable difference to my website's search engine ranking. As one of my networking partners said recently, 'You can take the girl out of tech, but you can't take the tech out of the girl!'"

Many personal chefs find pricing is a struggle in the beginning. When Patti started her business in 2003 as a member of PCN, many were using all-inclusive pricing. "I had not established a pricing model when I talked to my first potential client and after the client talked about wanting high-end meats and sea foods, I decided to adopt a fee-plus pricing model," said Patti. "It was definitely the right choice for me. I don't want my income to be tied to the cost of groceries and many of my clients have special diet needs, which often incur higher grocery costs."

Patti's Business Stats

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Joined Personal Chef Network, March 2003
Joined United States Personal Chef Association in 2009 with the merger of PCN and USPCA.





The Personal Side of Patti

Husband – Tom Spine, since 1995

Pet – Garage Kitty (GK), a stray cat who adopted us

Hobbies – sports, gardening, knitting (currently making baby blankets for Project Linus), and motorcycling with Tom.

Favorite cookbook – I don't have a favorite cookbook. Like most personal chefs, I have a large collection of cookbooks, but I'm more of an equal opportunity cookbook user. I don't have one that I always reach for or go back to. I tend to read cookbooks more than I actually cook from them.

Favorite magazine – It changes all the time, but right now it's Fine Cooking.

Most indispensable tool

or piece of equipment – my knives (of course) but, beyond that, a 12-inch everyday pan. It is my most used and most versatile piece of equipment.

PC Mobile – white Jetta wagon, nicknamed Moby the ChefMobile

Heroes – One of my culinary heroes is Judith Jones, a legendary editor at Alfred A. Knopf. It was Judith Jones who introduced us to Julia Child, and she helped shape modern cookbook publishing. She has devoted her life to making the recipes of great cooks accessible to home cooks. If you don't know of Judith Jones, read her memoir, *The Tenth Muse*.

Who shaped the way you think about food? - My mom. She taught me that cooking and food do not have to be complicated to be delicious.

If you could hang out for one day with a famous chef, who would you choose? - Nina Simonds. She is a spunky and creative cook. It would be a day full of laughs and great food.

My life lesson – Don't be afraid to try new things. This lesson was actually started at the dinner table by my mother. While I grew up in the age of the 'clean plate club,' there was no clean plate club in our house. Instead there was a rule that everyone had to try every item served for dinner. If you didn't like a particular food, you were served a small spoonful that you had to eat. This made me try foods that I thought I didn't like. Over time, those peas (that I didn't like at first) became one of my favorite foods. I still dislike baked beans, but I still try them if they are served to me.

The status of Patti's business

Since starting in 2003, cooking for clients has been Patti's only job and currently it is a full-time endeavor. She schedules up to four cook dates a week – Monday through Thursday; Friday is her office day. Patti says a 'perfect' schedule is alternating weeks of four cook dates and three cook dates. The weekends, usually Sundays, find Patti preparing client paperwork. She prints recipes and shopping lists, menus, invoices, and labels.

Patti's business focuses on offering the basic in-home service. "There are two main reasons why I focus on basic in-home services: 1) I prefer working with no timing pressures and 2) I want my evenings and weekends free to spend with my husband, friends, and family," Patti says.

The night before a cook date, she packs up her spices, pantry items, apron, and towels. Her equipment lives in the car, so that it is always ready. On cook days, Patti leaves for the grocery store around 8 a.m. She frequents one main store that is 10 minutes from her house, but sometimes she has to make another stop to get a few items. By 8:45 a.m., her shopping is usually done and she's headed to the client's home. Most clients are 20 to 30 minutes from the grocery store.

Patti's clients

Most of Patti's clients are monthly (every 4 weeks) and get 5x6 services with entrees and side dishes; a few get entrees only. Many are self-employed and busy professionals. The couples both work and some have children, but she does not market specifically to families, preferring instead to cook for adults.

Many clients have special dietary needs: gluten-free and other food allergies, low sodium, low cholesterol, and weight-loss/management programs. Patti said, "I'm passionate about helping people with special dietary needs. I love researching their needs and creating new dishes for them. My goal is to help them feel normal."

One client has a young daughter who has celiac disease and other food allergies. Instead of one entrée, she bakes something for the daughter, alternating between breakfast items like muffins or banana bread, and desserts.

Patti's routine

"I don't like to plan out the flow of my cook dates," Patti says. When she arrives at the client's home and unpacks, she decides what to start on. In addition to starting longer cooking or cooling dishes, she likes to start some dishes that give quick results, like roasted vegetables. Most of her clients eat brown rice, so many cook dates start with boiling water or broth and getting the brown rice in the oven. While dishes are simmering or baking, Patti is prepping for other dishes or starting a new dish. Dishes that need more attention are made while other dishes are simmering or baking.

"My timer with four settings and my highlighter are invaluable," Patti says. "I try to get tasks that I don't particularly like to do, like prepping green beans, done early in the day. I get discouraged if I'm faced with a huge pile of green beans at the end of the day."

One thing Patti struggled with at first, was cooling food. Part of the problem was space. Many of the kitchens that she cooked in were small and didn't have enough space to set up efficient cooling stations. This required her to get good at creating spaces that could be used as cooling stations. Cooking dishes are washed as she goes, eliminating having to face a sink full of dirty dishes at the end of her day.

While her focus is on providing basic personal chef services, she occasionally does small in-home parties. They account for about five percent of her business.

Packaging of choice is vacuum sealing

"Many of my clients have crazy schedules, either from working long hours or traveling. One of the things that I've done to help them is to package meals a little differently," says Patti, "Most of my services are 5x6s and most of my clients are couples. Instead of packaging each meal in three sets of two-serving portions, I package two sets of two-serving packages and two sets of single-serving packages. My clients love this packaging because it offers flexibility."

For most of her clients, Patti vacuum seals the meals. She prefers to do it all at once. This means that packaging waits until she is done cooking and cleaning up. After organizing everything that she can put away, the packaging process starts.

Once she's done packaging, all her gear goes out to her car, and then the invoice is written up. If the client isn't home, she might write them a short note on the invoice. She is finished anywhere from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m., depending on the service, the client, and the kitchen.

Current challenges

Patti said, "The economy has been a challenge lately. If my clients lose their job, I usually lose my job with them. The economy is also affecting me at the grocery store. The store is carefully watching costs and, as part of that, they are cutting back on inventory. I'm seeing products that I have purchased regularly no longer be available. For example, the store where I shop regularly wasn't selling enough organic beef, so they no longer order it. If I want organic beef, I have to go to another store."

When asked if there was ever a time when she wanted to give up, Patti said, "No, from the start I was committed to making it work. I knew it wouldn't be easy, especially at the beginning. But once I got a taste for working for myself, the thought of going back to a corporate job was a motivator to make it work."

When the rare 'bad day' comes along, Patti takes a quick break to refocus and get back into the game. When things don't go right, she slows down and does what she can to try to fix the problem. She tries not to dwell on difficult days.

Patti's helpful info for other PCs

"Develop relationships with your grocery store department managers. Regardless of where my clients are located, I do the vast majority of my grocery shopping at one store. To me, the relationships that I have established with department managers and store employees are critical to the success of my business. They understand what I do and need, and go out of their way to help me get what I need for my clients."

Budgeting time and money

Conferences, vacations and retirement are all planned expenses that Patti sets aside from her income. She and her husband have always saved for retirement. For the first few years of her business, she wasn't contributing directly to their retirement savings but, a few years ago, she opened an individual 401K. She now makes monthly automatic contributions to it, along with an end of the year contribution.

She schedules time for work and time for play. Patti says, "This isn't any different from when I was working for someone else."

Tooting her horn

When asked to 'toot her horn', Patti wrote, "My business is a reflection of me and what is important to me is the relationships that I establish with my clients. These relationships make it possible for me to learn, meet, and exceed their needs. I thrive on being challenged and I'm passionate about problem solving and collaborating with others. Last

September, Marcy Kaminski (a fellow USPCA member) and I were hired by Gluten-Free Culinary Productions to make gluten-free bread dough for Carol Fenster's presentation at the Gluten-Free Culinary Summit. The bread dough recipe was a collaboration between Carol Fenster and Jim Lahey of the New York Times No Knead Bread fame. We made the bread dough, the hotel kitchen baked it off, and it was served as samples to the Summit attendees during Carol Fenster's session."

Patti's Client-Pleasing Recipes

Fennel and Black Pepper-Crusted Lamb Rib Chops

Adapted from Cooking Light; serves 6

Ingredients

2 tablespoons fennel seeds

1 tablespoon coriander seeds

1 tablespoon black peppercorns

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon garlic powder (I use Penzey's Granulated Garlic)

18 - 2.5-ounce lamb rib chops, trimmed
(7-8 ounces of rib chops per serving)

Olive oil spray

Spice grinder

Broiler pan

Directions

Combine fennel seeds, coriander seeds, and black peppercorns in spice grinder. Grind to a fine powder. Add salt and granulated garlic to spice mixture. Press spice mixture onto both sides of each lamb chop.

Spray broiler pan with olive oil spray, arrange lamb chops on broiler pan. Preheat broiler, Broil lamb chops 4 inches from source of heat for 3 to 4 minutes per side, turning once.

Packaging

Arrange lamb chops in vacuum bags and seal.

Client instructions

Thaw overnight in refrigerator. Heat in simmering water for 5-10 minutes. Remove from bag and serve.

You can find Patti's recipe for Flounder Florentine in the online version of Personal Chef Magazine.



Chef Combines Profession and Passion; Offers Basic Service

By Personal Chef Shirley Scrafford, My Chef Shirley;
Shirley@mychefshirley.com

My love of food started at an early age, when I checked out cookbooks in elementary school. I went into Food and Nutrition/Dietetics in college and then started working as a Registered Dietitian 29 years ago.

As I followed my military husband around the globe, I strayed occasionally to work in a kitchen or catering, but I always returned to dietetics. I have worked in hospital settings, wellness, geriatrics, public health, long-term care, private practice, and consulting.

I love to cook and entertain and, when the time came for my husband to retire in the Washington D.C. area, I decided to follow my passion for cooking. I merged it with my nutrition profession and started a personal chef business for people looking for healthy meal alternatives. I have loved every minute of it for the past three years.

My business is, primarily, the basic in-home cook service. I limit myself to three cook sessions a week and use the other days for planning menus, shopping trips, keeping the books, and trying out new recipes. This schedule offers me the opportunity to provide my clients with the great tasting, personalized, nutritional meals they desire. I sometimes offer in-home cooking lessons and give talks to various groups as well. The lessons are fun, as a break to the norm, and I enjoy them. However, the variety of items I get to prepare during my basic cook sessions is what I love and find less stressful. I enjoy the steady work of regularly scheduled cook days, as opposed to the sporadic nature of party work. While I occasionally do cook for special event jobs like parties, special dinners and romantic dinners for two, the majority of my income comes from my basic cook services. I have children in school and have found that this type of schedule fits well with my family life. I have my weekends free and can enjoy extra time with them during the summer months. The downside of this type of business is that my time is not as flexible as my previous consulting work.

My clients are all health conscious with specific needs. Some of the special needs include diabetic, gluten-free, cancer treatment and survivors, cardiac diets, weight management, autism, and those wanting organic meals. Many of my clients are couples and require only a bi-weekly 5x4 meal service. Others purchase the service on a monthly basis, to supplement their own cooking or provide meals for entertaining.

My marketing methods have varied, but I have had the best results from my website. I always ask new clients how they heard about my service. Most people found my website using a search engine, while others found it via my Hire-A-Chef listing. Networking is essential as I have had several referrals from other dietitians in the area who know of my service. One of the easiest ways of finding potential clients has been putting my business cards up in local gyms. These people are interested enough in fitness to pay for a gym membership so they may also be interested in eating healthier. Finally, word-of-mouth and referrals from current clients are invaluable and effective marketing tools. Nothing beats a happy customer talking about your service.

The money aspect of the job is my least favorite. I charge on a fee-plus-groceries basis because of the fact that some clients eat organic and others require special food items which makes their grocery bills higher. Special events and cooking lessons are priced on a flat fee that

includes food costs. I do not charge for travel time, unless the job is over 30 minutes away.

My most interesting service is one that has me developing recipes for a company trying to get their product in more of the large grocery chains in the area. We are developing 30 minute infomercials to be played on a local station and YouTube. I will do cooking demonstrations of the recipes and talk about the product and its health benefits. I am cautiously optimistic about this project and the exposure for my business.

Being a personal chef is the most rewarding and enjoyable job I have ever had and I look forward to doing it for years to come.

Chef Patti Anastasia's Flounder Florentine

Adapted from The Complete Step-by-Step Low Carb Cookbook. This recipe serves 6.

Ingredients

Olive oil spray
1/2 cup minced shallots
12 ounces baby spinach
6 ounces cream cheese (or light cream cheese)
4 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
3/8 teaspoon salt
3/8 teaspoon black pepper
1/8 teaspoon crushed red pepper
6 flounder fillets, 6-7 ounces each
3 tablespoons panko breadcrumbs
Skillet
Broiler pan

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Heat a skillet coated with olive oil spray over medium heat. Add shallots; sauté 3 minutes or until tender. Add spinach and cook 1-3 minutes, until wilted. Turn heat to low; add cream cheese, Parmesan cheese, salt, black pepper, and red pepper. Stir well; remove from heat and let cool slightly. Divide spinach mixture among fillets, spreading evenly over each and leaving a 1/4-inch margin around edges. Roll up each fillet, jelly roll fashion, starting with the tail end. Place fish rolls seam-side down on a broiler pan coated with olive oil spray. Bake for 15-20 minutes or until the fish is just barely done.

Packaging

Arrange fish rolls in vacuum bags and seal.

Client Instructions

Defrost overnight in refrigerator. Heat in bag in simmering water for 5-10 minutes. Remove from bag and serve.