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# Personal Chef

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*Yummy-issimo!*  
Personal Chef Service

**Debbie Spangler**  
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# “ In my wildest dreams, I never thought I'd be a chef for a living... ”

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Started June, 2005  
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Married to husband, Tim, since 1988



In my wildest dreams, I never thought I'd be a chef for a living. Sure, I've always liked to cook and it was a great way to let off steam after a long, often frustrating, work week, but I was more interested in making money. Lots and lots of money. And I just couldn't see how cooking for a living would allow me to reach that goal.

I've had a LOT of different jobs in my 54 years. I've worked as a secretary – yep, we were called secretaries back in the 1970s. My first job started the day after I graduated from high school in 1975 and I made a whopping \$90 a week. I was working for my high school English teacher's husband who owned a large construction company (I was networking before I even knew what networking was!). After just two years I was promoted and moved into the payroll department. After a short time, I was again promoted to the head of the department responsible for handling payroll for hundreds of employees and quite a few different unions. This was my first experience with computers and we considered ourselves quite progressive at the time.

Then I thought I hit the big time when I moved to the “big city” of Dayton, Ohio. I was hired by a Fortune 500 company – again as a secretary, but I quickly grew bored and started jumping from job to job, always acquiring a new skill set. At a Big 8 (now Big 4) accounting firm, I learned how to read and interpret general ledgers and profit and loss statements (and gained a husband). At a national bank, I learned how to manage simultaneous projects for multiple divisions all with different, and quite diverse, goals and objectives. And as the cleaning contractor for slaughterhouses all over the country I learned the importance of appreciating and taking care of your vendors. While at the national garage door company, I learned how to set up photo shoots with professional photographers, how to design and layout brochures and the importance of clean, crisp copywriting.

Bored with Corporate America (or more accurately, Corporate America was bored with me), I started my first company – a marketing and graphic

design firm. At first I was the only employee and contracts were slow to come in but I slowly gained confidence, developed a network of useful contacts (photographers, artists, journalists and other marketing professionals) and learned the importance of networking.

During this time, I also decided to pursue my Master's degree at Miami University. Luckily a stipend was offered in exchange for my teaching two Public Speaking classes each semester along with working with the Student Public Relations Society. While I'd never been afraid of public speaking, teaching this course for two years gave me a lifetime's worth of experience and confidence so that I can now speak in front of any size group.

As I was just completing my Master's degree, my husband Tim (many of you know him from Facebook or Twitter as “sweet husband Tim”) purchased a fine jewelry store. So in addition to trying to finish a thesis, I was elbow deep in designing a retail space, developing a marketing plan, hiring employees, setting up sales procedures and (my favorite thing) purchasing the jewelry inventory. This time in my life was one of the most painful and most eye-opening. I found that I HATE working retail, that I'm an exceptional sales person who can up-sell with the best of them, and most importantly that I could successfully grow a company without spending thousands of dollars in advertising. It can be done, and done well, if you have a strong brand supported by a targeted marketing and public relations campaign and, most importantly, using networking as a key sales tool.

Why am I sharing this long and (probably) tedious employment background with you? To emphasize the point that every single, boring, painful or hated job I've had in the past has made me into the personal chef I am today. A successful personal chef must be more than just a great cook. Let's face it, we're all good cooks. What sets the successful chefs apart from everyone else? The ability to build a strong brand; identify and reach your target market; understand all aspects of your accounting; and, most importantly, be comfortable talking about your product and yourself while making other people want to talk about you and your product.

So how did the leap from jewelry store owner to personal chef happen? Right after 9-11 occurred, I was looking for ways to bring people into the store without spending advertising dollars. I decided to host a Chamber “Business After Hours” in the store. All it would cost me was the food and drinks. At first, I hired a caterer and that was a disaster. In addition to mediocre food that was terribly expensive, it had no visual appeal and it was no more appetizing than the pre-made party trays from the big box store down the street. I decided I'd cater the next event – and from that day on, the events grew to the point where we had to limit the attendance to 125. People would ask as they were leaving one event what the date of the next one was so they could put it on their calendar. But I finally knew I was doing something right when the husband of a very good local French chef asked if I'd share some recipes with him! And, yes, we made tons of sales during these events.

After that, I did some research and found USPCA. I talked (bullied) my way into the Atlanta CBA session right before the Hot-lanta Conference in 2005 and never looked back. As soon as I returned to Cincinnati I started contacting the jewelry store client list and all of my networking contacts. For

the first year or so, I cooked 1-2 times a week for 5x4 monthly clients. After the first year, I really started looking at the income, COGS (cost of goods sold) and profit margin and found that I could make a lot more money if I only cooked for weekly clients. It was too easy for monthly clients to skip a month – they're on vacation, the kids are out of school, or whatever the excuse – but the numbers showed I needed to search for clients who needed food on a weekly basis and that's where my business has been for the last three years. Today there are more clients than days in the week so, depending upon the day, there could be two or even three weekly clients on one cook day. And, yes, I've hired a helper!

I don't spend any money on advertising – never have – but I do strategic, targeted marketing. One of my contacts from the jewelry store is a DJ on a local morning radio show and in September 2006 she asked if I'd do a quick segment about tailgating recipes. The first segment was a success and over five years later I'm still on the air every Friday morning talking about three new



recipes for an average of 4-6 minutes. And best of all, while I don't pay a cent for this privilege the segment is sponsored by Meijer®, and they actually pay me! While this marketing opportunity isn't driving new business, it has built a significant name recognition in the tri-state along with helping to strengthen the Yummy~issimo! brand. And last year I was asked to co-host the entire morning show for three hours on New Years Eve! The other amazing result of the free airtime is that the radio segment drives people to my website for the weekly recipes. I've had several recipes with over 7,000 hits in one week while most average between 1,000-3,000 per week. That's a lot of people visiting my website – even if it's just to print out a recipe – and if they or someone they know needs a personal chef or boutique caterer, you can bet they'll at least think of Yummy~issimo! Since there are so many weekly clicks on the recipes from the radio, my website comes up first every time if you Google "Personal Chef, Cincinnati" or "Cincinnati Personal Chef."

Additionally, we all know the importance of taking care of our clients and giving gifts for special occasions like holidays or anniversaries but I learned the importance of taking care of my vendors very early in my career. As a marketing executive at a company in the early 1990s, I was inundated by salespeople all day, every day. One salesperson came in every week and always had a scratch-off lottery ticket to give to every administrative person in the office. They were all so happy to be acknowledged and even if I couldn't see him or didn't need anything from him, the staff always bent over backwards for him. He'd remember all of their names, their spouses, kids' and pets' names. He'd notice new hair styles or a new dress. Basically he was a staff favorite. So every time I'd need "this or that" if it was something he could supply, he was the first vendor anyone on the staff would call. This was a very valuable lesson for me and I make sure my vendors are well taken care of. I spend a great deal of my client food budget at Findlay Market ([www.findlaymarket.org](http://www.findlaymarket.org)), Ohio's oldest daily outdoor market and I've become good friends with my vendors. This summer, I had a cookout for my butcher, my cheese vendor and my spice

vendor and all their spouses and staff at my house. It wasn't anything fancy but you would have thought I'd thrown a black tie party for them. I remember them at holidays like Easter, 4th of July and Thanksgiving, but not Christmas. Why not Christmas? Because everyone is so busy and overworked, that my gifts would be overshadowed by the crush of the workload. They do remember, though, the Peanut Butter & Banana Cream Pie I gave them for Easter or the Maple Rum Pumpkin Pie I baked the week before Thanksgiving. The other great benefit of being friends with your food vendors? They'll tell me if something isn't as absolutely fresh and perfect as I need and steer me to something different that is perfect.

So what does the future hold for Chef Debbie and Yummy~issimo? For about three years, I've had a spice blend, called appropriately enough "Debbie's Southwest Blend" for sale at Colonel De's Herbs & Spice at Findlay Market (<http://colonelde.com/products-page/blends/southwestern-blend-debbies>) and it's become a best seller. I've used that spice blend to formulate several recipes for another of my favorite vendors, Gibb's Cheese, and it's the main seasoning in their Spicy Southwest Bandolier Turkey, along with their Spicy Southwest Dip. In addition to the spice, I'm working on several mayonnaise



and sauce recipes. One is currently being sold on a limited basis at my butcher's shop, another Findlay Market vendor, Eckerlin Meats. The Spicy Peanut Sauce is sold as a marinade or dipping sauce for beef, chicken, pork and shrimp and they give Yummy~issimo! recipes with the sauce. Other flavors in the pipeline include: Roquefort-Sherry Mayonnaise; Basil-Parmesan Mayonnaise; Spicy Orange Basil Marinade and a less spicy version of the Spicy Peanut Sauce with hints of orange and sesame.

From the jewelry store experience I found that I love creating hors d'oeuvres, or as one friend called them "mini masterpieces" along with all of the planning and execution that goes into black tie appetizer and cocktail parties. The more elegant and sophisticated the event, the more challenging it is and that really gets the creative juices flowing. Over the years, I've accumulated a large collection of antique glass serving pieces, china, crystal and all of the necessary equipment to handle a dinner party for up to 60 guests or a heavy appetizer party up to 150 and I love nothing more than pairing up an exquisite Victorian crystal platter or a one-of-a-kind Art Deco bowl with Yummy~ized blinis or jumbo marinated shrimp. As with the "we do it all" mentality of a personal chef, I apply that same mentality as a boutique caterer and tell the client "All you have to do is show up and be beautiful. We'll do EVERYTHING else."

Here are a couple of my always-a-hit, go-to appetizer party recipes:

## Yummy~ized Blinis with Dilled Egg Salad



Makes 36

Egg salad modified from: *The New Professional Chef: The Culinary Institute of America; 1996*

1 recipe: Deviled Egg Salad with Dill

36 Pepperidge Farm rye or sourdough party bread slices

2T butter, room temperature

¼ c Tobiko caviar, fresh\*

Garnish with any or all of the following:

sour cream

onion, finely minced

dill sprig

Old Bay Seasoning

Preheat oven to 350. Toast bread slices about 5-8 minutes each side. Cool completely.

Make Deviled Egg Salad with Dill and refrigerate until ready to assemble Blinis.

To assemble: Spread a very thin layer of butter over the entire area of one side of the toasted bread. Top with a generous layer of Deviled Egg Salad completely covering the bread to all edges.

Using a plastic or glass spoon (do not use metal), carefully place a dollop of caviar in the middle of the egg salad. Top with a swirl of sour cream and garnish with any combination of finely minced onion, fresh dill sprig, Old Bay Seasoning or an additional pinch of caviar.

Carefully cover and keep refrigerated for up to 4 hours. Remove from refrigerator at least 20 minutes before serving and allow to come to room temperature.

### Deviled Egg Salad with Dill

6 hard boiled eggs, peeled

2 T mayonnaise

2 T sour cream

1-½ t Dijon mustard

1 T parsley, fresh, chopped

1 T dill, fresh, chopped + additional for garnish

1 T chives, fresh, chopped

salt and pepper, to taste

Using a box grater on the medium grate side, grate the hard boiled eggs into a medium-sized bowl. Add mayonnaise, sour cream, Dijon, parsley, dill, chives and salt and pepper. Taste and adjust seasonings as necessary. Refrigerate until needed or, covered, up to 4 days.

\* Note – you can typically find frozen Tobiko caviar at any good fish market and you can purchase just the amount you need. Allow caviar to thaw overnight in refrigerator in a tightly sealed plastic or glass container and only use plastic or glass utensils when working with caviar.

## Jumbo Marinated Shrimp with Mango-Peach Salsa



Makes 40-50 pieces

Shrimp recipe modified from: *The Silver Palate Good Times Cookbook, 1985*

2 pounds jumbo shrimp, peeled, deveined, tails removed

3 c dry white wine

1 T mustard seeds

2 t red pepper flakes

1 bay leaf

4 lemons, cut in half

water

1 T basil, dried

1 T dill, dried

1 ½ t rosemary, dried, chopped

1 ½ t tarragon, dried

1 ½ t thyme, dried

3 garlic cloves, finely minced

2 T Dijon mustard

1/3 c fresh lemon juice (or more to taste)

¾ c olive oil

Combine white wine, mustard seeds, red pepper flakes, bay leaf and lemon in 4-quart stock pot. Add water to fill pot 3/4 full. Bring to a boil, add shrimp and cook over high heat until shrimp are just done, approximately 2-3 minutes. Drain and plunge shrimp into ice water to stop the cooking process.

Combine basil, dill, rosemary, tarragon, thyme, garlic, Dijon and lemon juice in large bowl and mix well. Slowly whisk in olive oil until it emulsifies.

Pat shrimp dry with paper towels and place in large zip-lock bag. Add marinade, seal and refrigerate at least 4 hours.

Prepare Mango-Peach Salsa.

When ready to serve, spoon salsa into mini decorative bowl or crystal cordial glass. Remove shrimp from marinade, allowing some oil and spices to adhere to shrimp. Skewer shrimp and place in middle of salsa in decorative fashion. Serve at room temperature.

# Mango-Peach Salsa

Makes about 1 ½ cups

- 4 ripe peaches, peeled, chopped
- 2 large mango, peeled, chopped
- 1/2 medium red onion, finely chopped
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded, finely minced
- ¼ c cilantro, finely chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded, chopped
- 6-8 limes, zested and juiced
- 1 T Debbie's Southwest Blend

Mix all ingredients in bowl. Refrigerate, covered, at least 2 hours and up to 72 hours. Serve at room temperature.

# Layered White & Chocolate Mousse



Makes about 24 mini servings

Chocolate mousse recipe modified from: *The Trellis Restaurant, Williamsburg, VA*

White chocolate mousse recipe modified from: *Personal Chef Magazine, 2001*

Garnish:

Whipped cream

Shaved chocolate

## Chocolate Mousse

- 3 oz semisweet chocolate, broken into 1/2oz pieces
- 3 oz bittersweet chocolate, broken into 1/2oz pieces
- 3 egg whites
- 2 T sugar

Melt chocolate in top of double boiler. Or if you don't have a double boiler, heat 1" of water in large skillet. Place chocolate in small saucepan that fits inside skillet, cover tightly with plastic wrap and place saucepan inside skillet. Allow chocolate to melt slowly, 9-10 minutes.

Remove from heat and whisk until smooth. Keep at room temperature until needed.

Place heavy cream in well chilled bowl of electric mixer. Using well chilled balloon whisk, whisk on high speed until peaks form – about 1 minute. Set aside until needed.

Whisk egg whites in large stainless steel bowl until soft peaks form – about 3 minutes. Add sugar and continue to whisk until stiff peaks form – about 2 minutes.

Add 1/4 of the whipped cream into the chocolate and whisk quickly, vigorously and thoroughly then hand whip chocolate mixture into egg whites. Add remaining whipped cream and fold all together.

Place in piping bag and refrigerate at least 2 hours.

## White Chocolate Mousse

- 2 T unsalted butter
- 4 oz white chocolate
- 1 c heavy cream
- 3 T sugar
- 1 t vanilla powder (if you don't have vanilla powder, scrape 2-3 beans)
- 3 oz cream cheese, room temperature

Melt butter and chocolate together over double boiler.

In chilled mixing bowl with chilled whips, beat cream until soft peaks form. Gradually add sugar and vanilla powder (or bean scraping) and beat until stiff peaks form. Set aside.

In another mixing bowl, beat cream cheese until fluffy. Gradually add in melted chocolate and beat until smooth and glossy. Fold in whipped cream by hand.

Place in piping bag and refrigerate at least 2 hours.

When ready to assemble, set out your row of serving glasses. Pipe chocolate mousse into bottom of serving glasses and fill about 1/3 full. Pipe white chocolate mousse on top of chocolate and finish with another layer of chocolate mousse on top of white.

Garnish with a swirl of whipped cream and sprinkle with shaved chocolate.

Refrigerate until needed or up to 3 hours. Serve at room temperature.

