

WCR CHEFS GET PERSONAL

By Candy Wallace



Candy Wallace is the founder of the American Personal Chef Association.

The standing-room-only session on the personal chef industry was lively. As executive director of the American Personal Chef Association (APCA), I led the session. I was not surprised by the intense interest and large numbers and was happy that attendees came prepared with such well-thought questions.

So much has been accomplished in the industry in the past year. In July 2002, I realized a long-term goal when the APCA signed a partnership agreement with the American Culinary Federation at its National

Conference in Las Vegas. This partnership validated the personal chef career as a legitimate culinary career path and was confirmed by the ACF's acceptance of the personal chef certification criteria, which the APCA proposed in January of 2003. This is the first time since 1929 that ACF has acknowledged a culinary career other than hotel chef, restaurant chef or caterer, so it is a very big deal. We worked hard to get to this point.

The personal chef industry is now not only thriving, but is also here to stay as a culinary career as more and more chefs look to prolong their professional careers or to take a break from institutional cooking. Additionally, many chefs who are in their second career and want to own their own businesses are joining the ranks of the successful personal chef businesses.

In addition, statistics from culinary schools show the need for the personal chef option. According to the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, within five years of graduating from culinary school, there are only 3 percent of women still in the business. When I read that, it made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. I knew I had to find a way for women to stay in the culinary industry, use their expensive education and to express their creativity in a situation other than institutional cooking.

Besides recent graduates of culinary school, there are the women who are veterans of institutional cooking. Joyce Goldstein issued a challenge at the close of last year's WCR meeting in Santa Monica, Calif., about needing to find a way to prolong the careers of those "women chefs of a certain age." The personal chef career has become an option for women chefs to remain in the industry and to control their own destiny.

Since personal chefs work for one client each day preparing multiple customized entrees to be enjoyed by the client in the future, it is a manageable working day for women who do not choose the long hours or schedules involved in institutional situations. Further, personal chefs manage their own schedules, so they can book as many or as few cooking dates as they choose each month.

It's nice to have options, and the personal chef industry is a realistic option for women chefs, no matter what their personal requirements.

Some facts about personal chefs

APCA has compiled the following:

- There are approximately 6,000 personal chefs in the U.S., 3,000 of which are active APCA members.
- The number of clients served is estimated at 72,000, generating \$52 million per year.
- Within the next 5 years at the present rate of growth, there will be nearly 20,000 personal chefs in the U.S., serving nearly 300,000 clients and contributing \$1 billion.

What all personal chefs ask

Five Big Questions:

1. Can I combine operating as a personal chef with catering?
2. Do personal chefs specialize in types of cuisine or special client needs?
3. Is there assistance available for chefs with strong back-of-the-house skills in setting up a business?
4. Is there ongoing professional support for personal chefs looking to network with peers?
5. Can I earn a living as a personal chef?

The answer to all the above is an unequivocal "Yes." The median income for a full-time personal chef runs from \$35,000-\$50,000, with some personal chefs who work for high-end clients earning closer to \$100,000.

For more information on the personal chef industry, visit www.personalchef.com or call (800) 644-8389.