



# Fine

## DINING in your Home

With soaring childhood obesity rates and ever-demanding children's activities, many families struggle to squeeze healthy meals into their schedules—it becomes a decision between Burger King and baseball, Taco Bell and tae-kwon-do, pizza or piano.

Personal chefs have become a growing solution to the dilemma, allowing families to eat healthily and be active without compromising parental sanity.

There's an important distinction between a private chef and a personal chef: while a private chef may be available to make a soufflé at a moment's notice, a personal chef comes by only once a week. Or once every two weeks, once a month—whatever is convenient for the family.

The American Personal & Private Chef Association defines the difference on its Web site. Private chefs are usually employed by one family full-time and “live in.” Personal chefs, however, usually cook and package multiple meals in one day, to be eaten when the client chooses.

It may sound like an indulgence, but chef Pamela Leveritt believes people need to “let themselves be taken care of.”

Leveritt's Sugarbeets Personal Chef Services LLC, based in La Grange, opened in January 2006. She also helped chef Kassie Jones, of Mama Kass Personal Chef Service in Lexington, get started.

“I think everybody can use this concept,” Jones said. “Everybody needs to eat, and everybody is busy.”

While every chef differs, the standard setup begins with an initial meeting that allows the chef to meet the family; find out likes, dislikes, allergies and dietary restrictions; and scope out the kitchen. Personal chefs usually work in packages, where a 5x4 would be five entrees for four people. Some families want 3x4, some need 4x6, or maybe just 5x2.

The chef will send over a menu for approval, then go shopping the morning of the cook date. After that, much of the day is spent in the client's house preparing entrees and sides. Depending on the arrangement, some



JAMES P. WATERS

Chef Steve Coomes

food will be refrigerated and some frozen.

“Each client takes about four to five hours,” said chef Steve Coomes. “It’s almost an hour per entree, but I cook all the side items, too.”

They bring most of their own cookware and leave the kitchen clean—maybe even cleaner than it was before they got there.

Coomes is new to the profession but not the industry, with a career dating back to his high school days in the 1980s. He started off as a bus boy and later became a food writer for trade publications, including [PizzaMarketplace.com](http://PizzaMarketplace.com). Interested in owning his own business, Coomes found this to be a perfect fit. Based in Goshen in north Oldham County, he officially started his Chef at Your Door business in early April.

Leveritt provided welcome assistance to Coomes and Jones—she believes there are plenty of families in need of the service and knows she can handle only so many herself.

“My goal is just to be there for whoever needs me, to cater to their needs,” she said. “But not to overwhelm myself where I can’t be here.”

“Here” is Leveritt’s home, where she also cares for her two daughters, ages 7 and 2. Becoming a personal chef allows her to have a flexible schedule and spend ample time with her children, which Jones and another personal chef, Jamie Carmody, also cited as major positives.

Carmody lives in Cincinnati but also offers her services in northern Kentucky. She started her business, Out of Thyme Ltd. nearly three years ago. After many years in hotels and private restaurants, she faced a personal dilemma.

“I could have worked my way up the ladder,” she said. “But I decided I’d rather have a family.”

Jones agreed.

“I can achieve my career goals but also be a mother,” she said. “I’m usually done by 3 p.m.”

Jones, who majored in food management at Ball State University, said she also likes the personalization and one-on-one interaction—something she did not have working for the university’s banquet and catering service.

The chefs also agreed their business gives them a unique venue for promoting healthier eating.

“We eat way too many preservatives,” Coomes said.

“I’m health conscious, but a lot of my family isn’t,” Leveritt said. “I realize that you have a choice, and you have to suffer the consequence of going to Burger King.”



JAMES P. WATERS

Chef Pamela Leveritt



TODD AYVAZIAN



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*Chef Kassie Jones*

*Chef Laura Duff provides a personal touch to the parties she caters.*

Of course, Leveritt admits to the occasional fast-food stop. "But I don't do it every day, and I pay for it after."

"I really just want to teach people about healthy food," she said. "And that you can have that food ready for you."

Like a balanced meal, many personal chefs round out their business with other services—private parties are a popular one.

For Jones, private parties are a natural progression. Her career as a personal chef derived from doing a lot of cooking for friends and family, she said. "I thought, I could probably make a career out of this."

Although similar to having a party catered, what Jones and other personal chefs offer is more intimate and customized. The meal is usually prepared in the home, with a completely personalized menu. Chefs will provide tabletop service—or not, if hosts want to do it themselves.

Jones said she will also stay and help clean up if the host asks for that service.

Laura Duff brings special elements to her parties. Her business, A Pampered Palate, is based in Paducah at Kirchoff's Deli. Kirchoff's is an artisan bakery, she said, giving her access to gourmet breads, cookies and other baked goods.



FRED MULLANE

"These days we're so rushed to get through food," Duff said, "We need to just take time to enjoy it and the company you're with."

One way she slows down a party is with magic performances, thanks to her husband, Todd.

"He will accompany me, do a cocktail hour walk-around," she said. Then, between the main course and dessert, he'll do a 20- to 30-minute magic show. Guests also get interesting souvenirs, like bent spoons.

Duff got her start as a traditional personal chef, cooking meals in clients' homes. She started in July 2005 and later partnered with Kirchoff's.

Because of his location and the timing of his business launch, Coomes had the opportunity to cook at several Derby parties. One allowed him to showcase his specialty, gourmet pizzas—a skill he honed over years of writing and researching about the dish. He served up a chipotle pizza, a spinach artichoke pizza and a couple of basics, according to the client, Joel Braun.

"It was fantastic," Braun said. "I've already booked him for 2008."

But while the chefs have all received positive feedback from clients, they also agreed marketing had been the biggest struggle.

"It's a new concept in this area," Jones said. "But people are understanding more and more."

Carmody said her time spent in the "back of the house," meaning the restaurant kitchens, has made promotion her biggest challenge.

"Now I'm doing the marketing and the sales—it's a little more responsibility," she said.

Kentucky's personal chefs hope more people will become familiar with and open to the idea.

"People just don't know what's out there," Leveritt said. "I want people to give themselves a chance."

—TRACY LIGHTFOOT



Chef Jamie Carmody prepares several meals for one family.



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Or visit the American Personal & Private Chefs Association at [www.personalchef.com](http://www.personalchef.com) to find these chefs and others in Kentucky.