



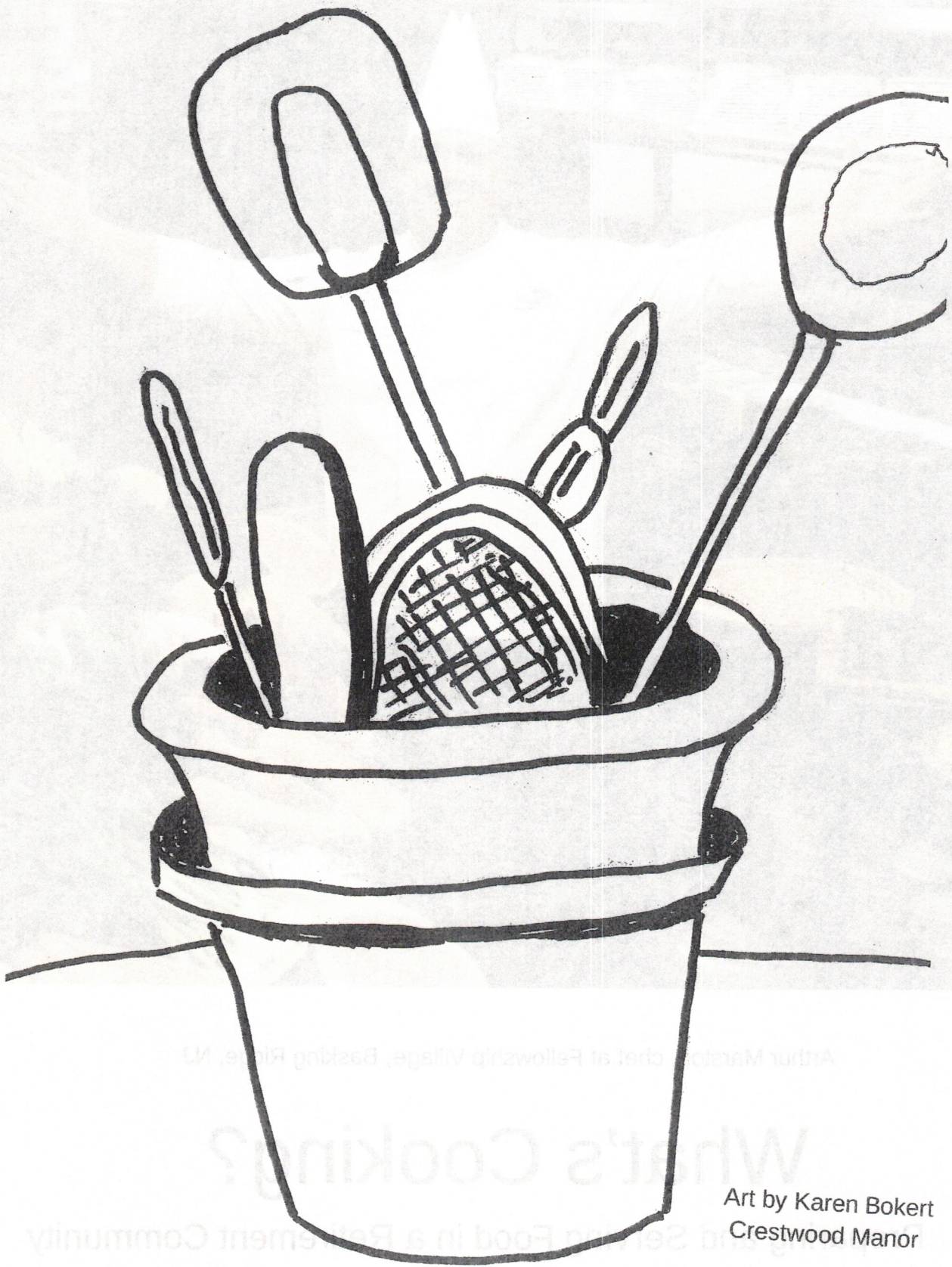
Arthur Marston, chef at Fellowship Village, Basking Ridge, NJ

What's Cooking?

Preparing and Serving Food in a Retirement Community

by Paul Basham

Sponsored by the Organization of Residents Associations of New Jersey (ORANJ)



Art by Karen Bokert
Crestwood Manor

WHAT'S COOKING?

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What are the challenges of cooking for a retirement community? To find out, I contacted several chefs who work in a Continuing Care Retirement Center. (CCRCs) They all agree that socialization and a regular routine are vital parts of the dining experience. During meal time people share their lives with others. Also, regular meal times provide consistency and a sense of security. If the food service routine is altered, confusion sets in and can affect the mood of the residents for hours. A familiar routine in food service reduces stress and anxiety. A calm mind boosts digestion.

Food plays an important role in our day-to-day lives, and more so when adults have to release control over their kitchen and food preparation. Eating healthfully and having an active lifestyle can support healthy aging. Food aromas, sights and sounds can evoke pleasant memories hidden in the brain. All the chefs I have contacted emphasize that small gestures can make a big difference in how we appreciate our food and each other.

I have found that the chefs in our retirement communities are a creative bunch that must steer around food allergies and serve crowd pleasing favorites without being repetitive. They know how to use fresh local seasonal ingredients and maintain first class standards in their cooking. They can take advantage of staff turnover which can bring new cooking styles into the kitchen. They can shift gears quickly in responding to the unexpected.

Our chefs have found that working in a retirement community is like cooking in another person's home. They have the same customers every day and quickly learn an individual's likes and dislikes. My contact with the chefs of our CCRCs has helped me to see how skillful they are in maintaining a family atmosphere in the hubbub of preparing a meal. The daily dining experience enables residents to build relationships and establish rapport. The chefs told me they value feedback from the residents and learn much by trial and error.

John Hanstein, chef at Cadbury at Cherry Hill, told me they have a food committee that helps in preparing the menus. Quiche is very popular with their residents. Each week in their four week food cycle they serve a different flavor of quiche. Other favorites include homemade coleslaw, potato salad, baked beans and baked desserts. John said, "All of our soups are made from scratch by our culinary team." Another popular item is "Sticky Bun Friday" which their baker makes every Friday. At Cadbury they have satellite kitchens and dining rooms that give residents a home-like feeling. In addition to a main dining room, they have a cafe where residents can have breakfast or lunch with friends.

Amy Panetta, chef at Meadow Lakes in East Windsor, said it is a challenge to keep menus exciting and interesting, especially when we are preparing food for different tastes. Some of their all time favorites are lamb chops, filet mignon and almost anything with salmon. She said, "Dealing with special diets always makes it hard."

Kitchen Wisdom

"I believe the light in a home shines brightest in the kitchen." Mary Jo Montanye

Justin Cann, chef at the Wiley Christian Retirement Community in Marlton, said that cooking during the pandemic was difficult when the residents had to eat in their rooms. He said, "Now that the dining room has reopened both the residents and the staff are very happy." He likes to celebrate each resident's birthday. I asked him if he gets any feedback from the residents about his cooking. He said, "I have an open door policy and I find out very quickly when the residents do not like something."

Kitchen Wisdom

"Enjoy yourself and have a sense of humor. After all, food is only part of the meal."

Alison Cayne

Timothy Drown, chef at Bristol Glen, UMC, in Newton, wrote, "Our menus need to embrace the diversity of our residents and their personal lifetime culinary experience." He enjoys their themed meals, like farm to table, when residents dress for the occasion. One of their favorite meals is sauerbraten, which is a tender beef roast that has been marinated for several days.

Kitchen Wisdom

"We've turned the act of cooking into something of a sport, but one in which both participants and spectators enjoy the thrill of victory."

Mario Batali

Stephanie Linton, chef at Medford Leas in Medford, said some of their popular items are BBQ ribs, Snowville Inn Mushroom soup, fried oysters with chicken salad and all comfort foods. She said that four times a year they host a special meal they call "Our Chef's Dinner" with themes like Wild Game, Jersey Fresh, and an Evening in the Arboretum. She said Medford Leas has teamed up with Organic Diversion to compost all food scraps which she noted has environmental and economical benefits. The most unusual meal she has been asked to serve is snapper soup. She said she never heard so many screams until the day a snake was discovered in the kitchen; but the 12 inch garter snake was quickly taken care of by a construction worker. Other amusing things that get a chuckle is when dentures are found on trays returning to the kitchen.

Kitchen Wisdom

"The appetite should be stimulated in the imagination first, so take time and care to present the food beautifully,"

Gino D'Acampo



Charles Arolla, Executive Chef, Applewood

Kitchen Wisdom

"Condiments are like old friends; highly thought of, but often taken for granted."

Marilyn Kaytor

"Food is symbolic of love when words are inadequate."

Alan Wolfelt

"To me, food is as much about the moment, the occasion, the location and the company as it is about the taste."

Heston Blumenthal

"Laughter is brightest where food is present." Irish Proverb

"In the childhood memories of a good cook there's a large kitchen, a warm stove, a simmering pot and a mom."

Barbara Costikyan



The winning resident teams of the Culinary Institute of Applewood recipe competition, wearing hats, left to right, are: Adrienne Freedman, Charles Clark, Joel Stern, Beverly Stern, Karen Slobodin, Bill Scheerer, Lynn Buckley and Pat Vallone. Kneeling in front, left to right, are Charles Arolla, Executive Chef, and Heath Braunstein, Senior Director of Dining Services.

Kitchen Wisdom

"Cooking is like painting or writing a song. Just as there are only so many notes or colors, there are only so many flavors. It's how you put them together that sets you apart."

"We all eat, and it would be a sad waste of opportunity to eat badly." Anna Thomas

"Tomatoes and oregano makes it Italian, tarragon makes it French, sour cream makes it Russian, lemon and cinnamon makes it Greek, soy sauce makes it Chinese, and garlic makes it good." Alice Brock

Kendria Jackman-Oakley, chef at Winchester Gardens in Maplewood, likes to add fresh new cultural twists to an old classic recipe and notes that the residents have come to expect the unexpected. Kendria wrote, "What surprises me the most about cooking in a retirement community is how receptive the residents are to change. At Winchester Gardens our residents welcome change with open arms as long as the changes are positive and communicated." Several days each week Kendria has a cooking "Action Station" where residents can see their food being prepared. Some of their meals are based on recipes submitted by the residents and are entitled, "Who's recipe are we preparing tonight?" Kendria wrote, "The most humorous event that occurred in my culinary work is having residents ask if our food will prolong their lives. I usually respond by letting them know that even though I look younger, we are all the same age. Working in the kitchen keeps me young."

Kitchen Wisdom

"When I've found a new dish or tried out a new technique in cooking, I get the same feeling as when I first learned how to ride a bike." Jamie Oliver

Heath Braunstein, Senior Director of Dining Services at Applewood in Freehold, talked about their monthly "Culinary Institute of Applewood" which includes a lecture, demonstration and workshop that is one of their most popular resident activities. Also popular is their "Recipe of the Month" and "Pop Up Events" which are unannounced product tastings when residents can sample new menu items. Some of the foods they have been asked to prepare are Tiramisu baked oatmeal, Romanesco broccoli, Red Wine Poached pears and alligator. Residents are given the opportunity to provide timely feedback on the menu and other services. Heath notes that their cooks often tease and joke with each other which makes for a fun work environment.

Kitchen Wisdom

"The colorful dishes you prepare with vegetables, herbs and spices can take your meal to a whole new level and convert it into an actual social event." Author Unknown

Bob Morrison, chef of The Pines at Whiting, said that cooking in a retirement center became more challenging when covid hit us, but he added, "We always seemed to find ways to make things work." Meals that residents are not shy in asking to have repeated are rack of lamb with a mint demi-glaze, stuffed pork loin with apple cranberry stuffing, salmon en croute, chicken cordon bleu and many others. Several meals follow a theme such as Chinese New Year, Oktoberfest, A Day at the Beach and Fifties Night. Bob wrote, "We aim to achieve the true flavor of each event in the hopes that residents can go back in time just for a bit to relive a sweet memory." To end a meal Bob sometimes serves homemade ice cream which he likes to make. The residents enjoy chatting with him about what flavor to make next.

Kitchen Wisdom

"Cooking done with care is an act of love." Craig Claiborne

Arthur Marston, chef at Fellowship Village in Basking Ridge, wrote, "One of the biggest challenges of cooking for a retirement community is accommodating all those different tastes. We take note of our successes and failures and eventually we learn what the residents want. Tastes are constantly evolving. With new residents come new challenges. By far salmon is the biggest crowd pleaser. But occasionally another fresh fish trumps it, like my Lemon Sole Amandine. Fellowship Village is fortunate to have a state-of-the-art Tapas Bar and Lounge where small plate appetizers are served. It has been my distinct privilege to prepare the unique menus for the Tapas Bar. Fellowship Village has put the 'home' back into the nursing home by creating household neighborhoods with all the amenities of home. What a thrill it is to walk through the dining room and have residents thank you for such a memorable meal. We sometimes have lighthearted fun when we ask a rookie cook or new server to get a bucket of steam or put the holes back in the donuts until they realize we are having a little fun at their expense. But it always gets a good laugh."

Kitchen Wisdom

A good motto to follow in cooking for a retirement community is a quotation by Virginia Woolf, "One cannot think well, love well or sleep well if one has not eaten well."

Mark Klein, chef at the House of the Good Shepherd in Hackettstown, said their community "is very big on fish." One of their favorites is salmon salad with cranberry vinaigrette. Mark said, "We are currently under renovation for our dining room and a lot of new things will be happening." He added, "Working with my cooks, each with a different personality, is always entertaining."

Kitchen Wisdom

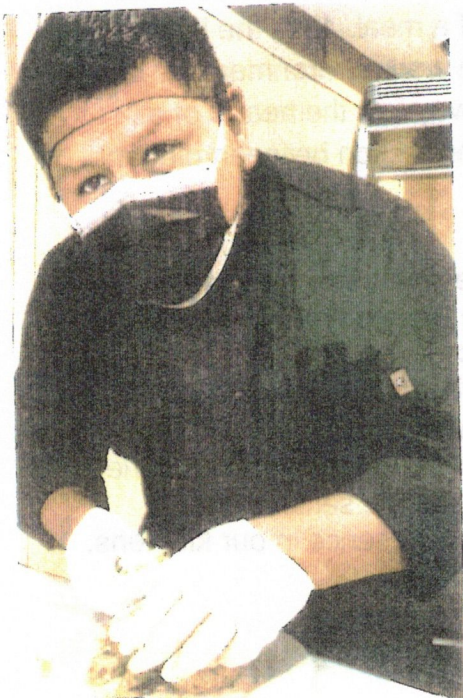
"Sorry, there is no magic bullet. You gotta eat healthy and live healthy to be healthy and look healthy. End of story."

Morgan Spurlock

Carlos Mohammed, Executive Chef at Cedar Crest in Pompton Plains, said it is always a challenge to cook for different demographics of people in a senior living community where there are many dietary restrictions. He said the key is to have enough different offerings to provide something for all residents. Carlos noted that he is beginning to see a huge influx of residents that want to go completely vegetarian and he is changing their menus frequently with this in mind. Their steak Diane and calves liver with onions are very popular with their non-vegetarian diners. Carlos told me he is surprised by how adventurous are some of their residents, many of whom are very food knowledgeable. He said, "I have been tasked with providing a more diverse array of dishes from different ethnicities and countries." He then told me this story, "During one of my after dinner rounds at the tables I was invited to be seated with a group of residents. I was then given a thirty minute lecture on how the grandmother of one of the residents made marinara, and how I should do the same. It was an extremely funny experience, but was also enlightening because the grandmother had used some interesting ingredients. Needless to say, I will be playing around with this grandmother's recipe soon."



Atrium at Navesink Staff, left to right, Corey Tuccillo, Director of Dining Services; Carlos Cruz, Arnie Muniz, Jadda Tucker, Ryan Valli and Anthony Santiago.



Atrium at Navesink Chef, Eleazar Lopez



Kendria Jackman-Oakley
Chef at Winchester Gardens

Corey Tuccillo, Director of Dining, and **Eleazar Lopez-Perez**, Executive Chef, at Atrium at Navesink Harbor in Red Bank, indicate that some of their favorite menus are Chilean sea bass, Eleazar's special corn beef, lamb chops with mint jelly and homemade gnocchi with bolognese sauce. They both are surprised how much their residents know about food and are full of ideas about how some of the dishes can be improved. Their summer menus will include dishes based on a recipe submitted by a resident with information about that resident. Some of the programs planned for the summer will include pizza classes with Corey and chef Eleazar's cooking demonstration. Also, dining by the Navesink River is very popular. Corey said, "Our mission is to inspire our residents with endless opportunities to be engaged in our culinary program."

Kitchen Wisdom

"Healthy citizens are the greatest asset any country can have."

Winston Churchill

Thomas Lisi, chef at Seabrook in Tinton Falls, is surprised by how the residents keep informed about all the current food trends. The challenge is to provide menus that are suitable for everyone's needs. Favorites are pistachio crusted salmon and anything with ground beef. He is impressed by how cleverly his staff dress up for the holidays.

I hope you have enjoyed this peek into the kitchens and dining rooms of our CCRCs. Thanks to all the chefs that have invited us in. Food is the fuel that keeps us active and alive. The chefs are the unsung heroes that create a camaraderie in working together that permeates throughout the entire retirement community. Radiating out from the inner circle of the cooking staff are waves of nostalgia that calms the soul made possible by a creative culinary repertoire.

The chefs, cooks and servers of our retirement communities contribute far more than they know to the health of our residents. They not only coax the best flavors out of the food, they create amenities that enhance the social aspect of a meal. Also, the kitchen personnel use the magic of food to help generate a favorable work environment for the staff in all the other departments. Chefs slice and dice their way into the hearts of all those under their influence. They are aware there is a vital connection between diet and a person's overall well-being.

There is a big difference between cooking and "cheffing". The chefs see the whole picture and understand the value of a smooth running routine. They are very picky about the ingredients required to produce a quality dining experience every time. There are no second chances. Gourmet showmanship goes along with orchestrating a home-style meal that is not only pleasing to the eye, but also tasty and nutritious. Chefs take note there is an increase of health conscious diners who keep a close watch on their calorie intake. Chefs are part of the hospitality industry that has invaded the senior living quarters. We are grateful for their professional and unflustered presence in our kitchens.



Happy Hour at Winchester Gardens, Maplewood, NJ
Photos by Kendria Jackman-Oakley, Chef

Culinary Inspiration

"America gave the world the notion of a melting pot, a cooking device wherein diverse ethnic groups voluntarily mix together, producing a new American identity. While critics may argue that the melting pot is a national myth, it has formed America's collective imagination in its food." Ivan Kraster

"I think a lot of people who start to work in the kitchen of a retirement community think it's all about food, but they learn very quickly it's all about people." Joanne Chang

"When you run a kitchen, no matter how chaotic it gets, the chef has to be the calm one. The guests pick up on it very quickly if the chef shows any sign of panic." Nina Compton

"I get happiness from seeing people's eyes when they eat the food I've cooked. That feeling, when you can light up someone's soul with something you've prepared, that is a privilege and an honor." Chef Anna Khan

"Food is maybe the only universal thing that really has the power to bring everyone together. In every culture around the world, people get together to eat." Guy Fieri

"I'm just someone who likes cooking and for whom sharing food is an expression of friendship." Maya Angelou

"If you're not the one cooking, stay out of the way and compliment the cook." Michael Strahan

"Happiness depends on a leisurely breakfast." John Gunther

"In France, cooking is a serious art form and a national sport." Julia Child

"For many chefs, the kitchen is not a job but a calling." A retirement community CEO

"Health requires healthy food." Roger Williams

"After a good dinner one can forgive anybody, even one's own relatives." Oscar Wilde

"The preparation of food is merely another form of art, one of the joys of civilized living." Dione Lucas

ORANJ and CCRC

ORANJ is the acronym for Organization of Residents Associations of New Jersey.
CCRC is the acronym for Continuing Care Retirement Communities.

The following CCRCs are part of ORANJ and are grouped in the following five regions.

Northwest Region, Herb Friend, VP

Bristol Glen, UMC, Newton

Cedar Crest, Pompton Plains

Cranes Mill, West Caldwell

The Oaks at Denville

House of the Good Shepherd, Hackettstown

Central Region, Richard Ober, VP

Applewood, Freehold

Monroe Village, Monroe Township

Meadow Lakes, East Windsor

Stonebridge at Montgomery, Skillman

Atrium at Navesink Harbor, Red Bank

Northeast Region, VP Vacant

Laurel Circle, Bridgewater

Fellowship Village, Basking Ridge

Lantern Hill, New Providence

Winchester Gardens, Maplewood

Southeast Region, Gary Baldwin, VP

Crestwood Manor, Whiting

The Pines, Whiting

Harrogate, Lakewood

Seabrook, Tinton Falls

Southwest Region, Barbara Trought, VP

Cadbury at Cherry Hill

Medford Leas, Medford

Lions Gate, Voorhees

The Evergreens, Moorestown

Wiley Christian, Marlton

Friends Village, Woodstown

Allegria at the Fountains, Atco

ORANJ Mission Statement

ORANJ exists for the purpose of supporting, empowering and bettering the lives of senior citizens in New Jersey. We accomplish this mission by:

- (a) Facilitating communication among member resident associations.
- (b) Keeping abreast of developments in the world of senior citizens
- (c) Coordinating action on behalf of the rights and responsibilities of residents.
- (d) Monitoring the enactment and enforcement of laws pertaining to CCRC residents

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Paul Basham, Secretary



Photos from the dining room of Atrium at Navesink Harbor in Red Bank