



Delivered *to Your* Door

Eugene-area personal chefs

BY ABRA COHEN

THE HOLIDAYS ARE QUICKLY APPROACHING, and families have settled into fall schedules. But with after-school and holiday activities taking up the majority of daylight hours, preparing a well-balanced, home-cooked meal often proves impossible for some.

Which is why many busy parents and working professionals are leaving the cooking to Eugene-area personal chefs, who design custom-made meals and deliver them directly to your kitchen table.

“Parents get unhappy about going out to dinner all the time and would like to get back to the dinner table to make sure their kids are eating well,” says Chef Shelly Shirk, owner of Inspired Tastes in Eugene.

Shirk, who went to culinary school at Kitchen Academy (a branch of Le Cordon Bleu) in California, says that her clients typically have very busy schedules and enjoy the flexibility she offers them by cooking well-rounded meals in their home.

Specializing in what she calls “listening to how people like their food,” Shirk uses a questionnaire to find out how her customers enjoy their food seasoned, what types of protein they like, and other options that help her design an individualized menu based on their taste preferences.

When she’s done cooking, Shirk cleans up the kitchen and leaves without a trace—except for the freshly made food she has placed in the fridge. While her clients have many reasons for using her service, saving time is a theme she hears a lot.

Ivy Cotler got into the personal chef business in 1992 after working as a hydrologist for the federal government. She explains this drastic career shift as a decision to do what she loves. And even after 20 years, her love of cooking is evident—something she credits to her grandmother.

A self-taught chef, Cotler prepares meals out of her own kitchen (which has been certified by the Oregon Department of Agriculture) and delivers them on Thursdays.

With a sizable customer base, spanning from new moms to elderly couples, Cotler says there is no commitment with her service, and people can choose if they would like her meals once a week, once a month, once a year, or whatever other schedule works for them.



Chef Shelley Shirk (above), and Chef Beck (below).





(top) Chef Becky offers personalized menus for her clients. (below) Chef Ivy Cotler has been a personal chef since 1992.



Her meals are all vegetarian (with gluten-free and other alternative options available), and she changes her menu every two months. Her recipes are ones she either came up with herself or modified to make her own.

Cotler uses the fruit of her own bountiful garden or else buys locally grown produce as much as possible. She makes her own pesto, uses her grandmother’s recipes for all her salad dressings, and turned her bumper crop of tomatoes this year into sundried tomatoes. During the summer and fall, Cotler puts together \$5 “mini CSA” baskets for her customers that include whatever is in abundance from her garden.

Seasoned Chef Becky McConnell opened her business in 2000. (You might recognize her from cooking segments on KMTR.) McConnell says she has seen lots of diet fads come and go in the 13 years she has been cooking for her customers. “A lot of my clients have special dietary needs,” McConnell says, pointing to diets like paleo, macrobiotic, and the South Beach diet. “They have really run the gamut—I’ve done it all,” she says, including working with several Duck football players on food plans.

Unlike Cotler and Shirk, McConnell uses a database of more than 1,500 recipes to create customized menus for her clients. She prepares her customers’ individualized meals in her own kitchen and delivers them in microwavable and oven-safe containers. “My portions are large,” she says, “and because this is an upscale service, I want my clients to know they are getting a good value for their money.”

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