

Sunday, December 9, 2001

## 2 UNIQUE



KELLI LEWTON

## Holidays can be a breeze when you plan

**F**estive lights are hung, trees twinkled and anticipation grows as the holidays and festivities approach over the next several weeks.

Many holiday food traditions have been revamped to fit daily demands. With our busy lives and commitments during the holiday season, we should think ahead with our holiday planning.

Holiday entertaining can be easy and enjoyable if you think ahead!

### Pinpoint your needs

First, take the time and pinpoint exactly what you need to accomplish with your holiday entertaining. Often when left to a few days before the special celebration, we tend to complicate matters. Include in your repertoire a few items that can be made ahead and frozen. Almost anything in phyllo or puff dough, such as spinach triangles or petit wild mushroom turnovers, can be a quick hors d'oeuvre pulled out of the freezer.

Imported cheeses, salamis and pates can be assembled with crackers, breads and marinated items for a fast, but still interesting, platter.

Try dip and spread trays. Most dips can be made days in advance and served with an array of items including breads, veggie chips, crackers, toasted bread rounds, puff pastry sticks and pita chips.

Remember when garnishing platters to keep things simple and beautiful, like using bouquets of fresh herbs. Select garnishes that may be eaten with the main item, such as caramelized smoky onions, roasted peppers and whole roasted garlic bulbs, which is stunning as well as functional on a beef tenderloin platter.

Create your own countdown list to your seasonal party or holiday or try this "12 Days before Christmas" list as a good start:

**Day 12 - The Master Checklist.** Every great event has great beginnings. A master plan blueprint is the key to success. Your list may include rentals, inventory of your china, linen, serving pieces, and a time line for tasks to prevent any last-minute trips to the store.

### Get a menu together

**Day 11 - Plan Your Menu.** The most crucial part of a holiday feast is, of course, the food. In addition to family favorites, Christmas is a time to gather recipes you have wanted to try, and maybe even experiment with.

When planning your menu, it is essential to have a good mix of items to fit everyone's appetites, including a few selections that are on the lighter side. Try to prepare a few of your items in ahead of time to limit stress. Some menu components, including baked goods, chutneys and dressings, can be made well before your event day.

Don't forget to place any special meat or bakery item orders well in advance so you're not disappointed on your last-minute shopping trip to your favorite market.

### Day 10 - Purchase All Beverages.

Remember to buy beer and wine at room temperature, then immerse them in an ice bath in coolers or party tubs an hour before guests arrive. It is hard enough to fit all the extra food items in the refrigerator without having to work around cases of pop, beer and wine.

### Day 9 - Create a Game Plan.

It is close enough now to the date of your event to make any reminder calls to family and friends about times and details. This is also a great time to assign tasks for family members to help with the preparation. A couple of hors d'oeuvres prepared today and frozen would be a great time saver to your gathering. Puff and phyllo dough style items normally freeze great!

**Day 8 - Baking, Baking and more Baking.**

Please see 2 UNIQUE, D3

## LOOKING AHEAD

- Holiday desserts
- Culinary Adventures

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## DINING AT THE

# Award-winning chef shares passion for food

BY RENÉE SKOGLUND  
STAFF WRITER



**S**urely, there's no other kitchen like this side of heaven like the Detroit Athletic Club's.

Located on the second floor of the prestigious private club on Madison Avenue in downtown Detroit, the main kitchen, with its immaculate tiled floor and mile-long stainless steel hot table, is a culinarian's dream.

Call it inspiration or training, but its 34-member staff routinely prepares and serves dinner entrees for 250-300 patrons in an hour and a half during opera season. And every dish comes out looking like edible art.

Award-winning Executive Chef Kevin Brennan of Walled Lake, a graduate of the Schoolcraft College Department of Culinary Arts and a recent inductee into the American Academy of Chefs, isn't surprised.

"Food is important here. It is the foundation of our focus," he said.

Indeed, Dining at the DAC, founded in 1887 and located in its present six-story Albert Kahn-designed building since 1916, is all about passion, presentation and superb taste.

Dan and Nancy Lie of Farmington Hills, members for 18 years, love dining at the DAC. "I love the Lobster Bisque," said Dan, who serves on the board of directors and is currently club secretary. "My favorite entrée? The perch. It's just great. It melts in your mouth. No place serves perch like the DAC."

"The food to me is outstanding. It's a step above most other restaurants," said Nancy. Bob Richardson of Bloomfield Hills, a 30-year member and 1990 president, cannot remember ever having a bad meal at the DAC. His favorite lunch combination is the Eric Salad and Lobster Bisque. "There's nothing like it around the country," he said about the soup.

### Consistency

Dining at the DAC is also about consistency. Two soups - the famed Lobster Bisque and Roasted Tomato Bisque, the Grille Room's signature soup - have been house favorites for years.

Charlie Frurip, the DAC's sous-chef for 31 years, is in the kitchen by 4:30 a.m. every day. It's nothing to have 48 chickens and 20 pounds of vegetables simmering away by mid-morning. Good soup starts with "good stock and nice, fresh ingredients," he said.

For his tomato soup, Frurip first roasts a case of plum tomatoes.



Chef Greg Stange



STAFF PHOTOS BY HAL BRADLEY

**A class act:** Chefs Matthew Vogeley (top row, from left), David Howell, Greg Stange, Edmund Krumuns, Kevin Brennan and Vicki Arella help make the DAC a rival to the area's finest restaurants.

## ■ 'My menu doesn't fall into a regular style. It's eclectic - Asian, Regional, Mediterranean and West Coast California.'

-Kevin Brennan  
Executive chef, DAC

Does in olive oil, along with carrots, garlic, celery and some fresh fennel. He blends this with chicken stock and lets it simmer. By noon, the soup is ready to be served with a garnish of basil and walnut pesto and parmesan crème fraîche.

Like any professional soup-maker who cooks with pounds and pounds rather than pinches, Frurip hesitates before giving advice about avoiding mistakes in making the perfect soup.

"Maybe it's trying too hard. What can I say? Some people use too much water. A lot of people are afraid to use canned broth. If you don't have time to boil chickens or bones, use Swanson's," he said.

### Style

Chef Brennan describes his culinary style as being both creative and traditional. "I do seasonal cuisine with a traditional background. My menu doesn't fall into a regular style. It's eclectic - Asian, Regional, Mediterranean, and West Coast California."

DAC members have their favorite dishes, and the perch and whitefish are still top. However, Brennan takes his whitefish entrée beyond the usual planked and broiled version. He wraps the fish with "panko" (Japanese bread crumbs), pan sears it before a quick finish in the oven, then serves it with a lemon-butter sauce and chili vinaigrette. "The flavor contrast is phenomenal," he said.

"Their whitefish can't be surpassed," said Janet Campbell of Plymouth Township, who's been dining at the DAC since 1947, when her father joined. She and her husband, Mom, have been members since 1959.

"It's like going to Hudson's and not ordering a Maurice salad," she said, explaining her addiction to Brennan's whitefish. "Every time I go to the DAC, whitefish is what I usually order. Cooking fish properly is not difficult, but it does require skill," said Brennan.

"It really depends on the variety, thickness of the fillet and cooking method. Generally, when it's done it's slightly resistant to pressure. That's when you know you have a nice medium to medium-rare piece of fish."

"One of the worst things you can do is to over-cook fish. Steak fish such as swordfish or tuna should never be cooked more than medium, ideally medium rare."

### Lamb perfection

Rack of lamb often appears on the DAC menu, an item from which most cooks at home shy away. Don't be timid, says Brennan. The secret is simple.

Start with a 9-11-ounce rack of baby New Zealand lamb. Season it in clarified butter to

seal in the juices. Clarifying removes the easily burnable milk from the butter and allows for a higher smoking point.

(To make 1 cup clarified butter, start with 1 1/4 cups butter. As it slowly melts in a small saucepan, it will separate into three layers: foam, fat, and water. Skim the foam off with a spoon and discard. Next, separate the clear yellow milk fat from the water by decanting the butter into another container, being careful not to let any water slip in. Finally, dab off any existing foam.)

After a quick searing, the lamb is ready to be rubbed with spices and baked in a 400 to 425-degree oven for 12 minutes.

"Lamb is naturally sweet," said Brennan. "It requires the harmonizing flavors of garlic, thyme, mustard and rosemary. It needs that to offset the sweetness. The secret to roasting is proper timing and good control."



**Edible art:** Chefs Stange (left), Brennan and Krumuns present papaya-marinated duckling, pan-seared salmon on fingerling potato salad, and an Autumn Turnover, an appetizer made with spaghetti squash, leeks and Granny Smith apples.

So what does Chef Brennan's Pan Roasted Rack of Lamb with caramelized rhubarb-Vidalia onion chutney and a Merlot reduction sauce taste like? "It's wonderful," said Campbell. "It's extremely tender and gentle."

### Well-stocked pantry

Every kitchen should have a solid base of ingredients, said Brennan. "Especially the aromatics like onions, garlic, shallots, carrots and celery. I'm surprised at the number of people who do not stock these ingredients, which are the base for so many soups and stews."

Cure yourself of separation anxiety when it comes to spices, he said. Spices should not be as old as your mortgage. "People make the mistake of keeping spices since their house was built. After six months, throw the spices out."

Brennan suggests toasting some spices - such as mustard seed or coriander - in a dry pan to bring out their aroma and intensify their taste. "A Cambodian cook once told me, 'No smell, no good.'"

The DAC kitchen pantry is certainly well-stocked. Fresh fish is flown in three times a week from the famous M. F. Foley Company in Boston. And all baking, butchering, grinding, smoking and ice-cream making is done in-house. The only item the kitchen does not produce - for lack of space - is bagels.

### Challenge

Brennan, who's at the DAC 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. six days a week, enjoys the challenge of working in a private club.

"Clubs used to be known for stodgy menus, like prime rib and crab legs. Not any more. There is simply more range of expression. Here the challenges are fantastic. I tell all the young culinarians, 'You get into a club and you won't want to leave.'"

Do Brennan and his talented staff ever make mistakes? Oh, yes, he said. "But mistakes are made, not served." See recipes inside Taste.

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