

PRACTICE MATTERS



CHEF AND RD PARTNERSHIPS: RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

By Ruth Lahmayer Chipps, MS, RD, CD

Those stories about temperamental chefs who demand perfection remind me of my friend who once dodged a flying meat cleaver—thank goodness it landed on the butcher block! In all seriousness, chefs are a breed of their own, and over the years I've learned a great deal from these passionate professionals.

This article shares insight into the culinary arts professions, the challenges and rewards of working with chefs, and career expansion opportunities for RDs. I've also invited my good friend Thomas Sacksteder, CEC, to share some of his thoughts on working with RDs.

Defining the Profession

Much like the term *nutritionist*, chef can be used by just about anyone—we cook, therefore we are chefs, right? The discrimination lies in the training and certification. The American Culinary Federation is considered the primary certification institution for culinary arts professionals, with 14 levels of certification available. Each requires specific qualifications and knowledge of culinary nutrition, food safety/sanitation, and management. Work experience is also a critical component of certification.

Certifications begin with Certified Culinarian (CC) and ascend in skill level from Certified Sous Chef (CSC) to Certified Chef de Cuisine (CCC) to Certified Executive Chef (CEC) to Certified Master Chef (CMC). This highest level requires an eight-day testing process with exams in front of peers. Certifications for personal chefs, baking/pastry professionals, and culinary educators are also offered. For more information, visit www.acfchefs.org.

A Perfect Pairing

Many RDs already work with chefs in a variety of settings—from commercial foodservice and education programs to retail operations and product development. The combination of the two professions is a perfect fit for today's expanded interest in healthy eating, food products, and culinary education. Everyone loves unique food at an event, and there's something about tall white hats that adds to the excitement. Some RDs have even expanded their education to attain chef certifications and wear their own hat, which is a very marketable skill combination for food companies, foodservice operations, and restaurants.

The following are a few ideas to whet your appetite about chef/RD partnerships:

- **Hospital Foodservice:** A chef on staff means exciting culinary options such as chef-designed, RD-approved room service menus; dining room menu development with healthy gourmet options; deli counters with healthier choices designed by chefs and RDs; and delicious, healthful take-home meals.
- **School Foodservice:** Some districts have made unique strides in their required wellness program by hiring chef consultants to enhance menu choices and provide fun educational opportunities for the classroom.
- **Retail Food Stores, Supermarkets:** RD- and chef-designed deli and quick-pick choices, meal solutions, menus, food demonstrations/tastings with the RD and chef, culinary store tours, and enhanced catering choices.
- **Wellness/Weight Management Clinics:** Bringing a chef into the multidisciplinary team of RDs, exercise physiologists, and behaviorists is a growing trend in healthy living/weight management programs. The chef can offer a variety of services: cooking demos with the RD, culinary advice for program participants, home-chef services, and food product brands featuring the chef and RD.

Culinary Confidential

If you're thinking about working with a chef, here are a few words of advice gained from 15 years of interacting with these interesting professionals in various settings:

- The chef rules in the kitchen, so abide willingly.
- Keep your "mis en place." Be sure to tidy your work area and return all ingredients and utensils to their proper chef-defined location.
- Be spontaneous and flexible with your time and suggestions in the kitchen. Chefs are a creative bunch; we wouldn't want them to feel stifled.
- Frequently offer appreciation and compliments for their works of "eat." They truly are artists and thrive on the feedback they gain from their tasters.
- When modifying recipes, give the chef as much latitude as possible with the amount of fats/oils and a specific maximum amount per serving. After the meal design, go back to your office to analyze the nutritional content. If additional modifications are needed, ask for the chef's advice and brainstorm together (after you've complimented the delicious food).

A CHEF'S PERSPECTIVE

By Chef Thomas Sacksteder, CEC

Ten years ago, I thought dietitians were a chef's worst enemy—always trying to cut rich ingredients out of recipes and tallying up the fat and calories while they ate lunch. Now, after working side by side with a number of talented RDs, I have found a new appreciation for the profession. They have challenged me to find new methods to prepare great-tasting foods that meet healthy eating guidelines. I've also been inspired to make strides in my own cooking at home with a greater emphasis on whole grains, vegetables, and fruits. I've even started growing my own herbs and vegetables in urns on my deck.

Dietitians have helped me stretch my skills to invent healthy gourmet foods that really are satisfying. As an executive chef at a major medical center in the Midwest, some of my duties include developing catering choices for medical

staff and regional VIPs, enhancing patient foodservice through our new room service format, and providing food choices for a staff of more than 3,000—24 hours per day.

With my emphasis on gourmet healthy cuisine, I have a chance to educate guests and staff on proper portions, the role of herbs in flavor enhancement, and incorporating locally grown produce. Additionally, I've presented many educational sessions on culinary skills and copresented healthy cooking classes with an RD by my side.

For more than eight years, Ruth Lahmayer Chipps, MS, RD, CD, and I hosted a healthy eating television spot for regional network news that featured healthy foods, recipes, and techniques. It was a hit, and we became known as the healthy eating duo in our community. When I shop for myself, it's fun to share ideas in the produce

department of the local supermarket, as many folks recognize me as the "chef from TV."

Because of the opportunity to work with RDs, I've challenged myself to cook with less fat and use alternative ingredients that add flavor, texture, and mouth appeal. And I've been able to help change the misperception that healthy foods don't taste good. To the contrary—healthy foods taste the best.

Here's some advice for dietitians thinking about working with chefs:

- Offer guidelines to work with that are in common terms, such as 1 tablespoon of oil per serving vs. grams.
- Allow chefs to utilize their creative skills in recipe development vs. imposing strict limitations on ingredients.
- Take time to understand the intensive training that certified chefs have undergone.
- Take a course in culinary arts.
- Consider getting a certification from the American



Chef Thomas Sacksteder, CEC

Culinary Federation—there are 14 different levels.

- Most chefs like to be in the spotlight, so give us a chance to share our skills through presentations. We love applause and appreciation.
- Develop a love for all types of cuisine—from ethnic to American.
- Be flexible, be a foodie, and make it fun!

— Chef Thomas Sacksteder, CEC, is the certified executive chef for a major medical center in Wisconsin. He also has a consulting business that provides culinary services and education.

Be sure to include the chef's credentials in any marketing materials and other information. They've worked hard for their certification, so be sure it's recognized by the audience. CEC is a title of distinction among chefs, just like RD in the field of nutrition.

— Ruth Lahmayer Chipps, MS, RD, CD, is a media spokesperson who has worked with chefs for more than 15 years in addition to branding programs for weight management, healthy eating, and foodservice.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

American Culinary Federation:

www.acfchefs.org

American Dietetic Association Dietetic Practice Group — Food & Culinary Professionals:

www.foodculinaryprofs.org

Food Dictionary:

www.epicurious.com/tools/fooddictionary