

Who's Who In The Kitchen

From Pot Washer To Executive Cook, Joe Deas Learned Everything From Scratch

By Audrey C. Lodato
Post Staff Writer

When Joe Deas was helping his mother in the kitchen as a youngster, he may not have thought he'd one day be an executive chef, but that's what happened.

From his start 32 years ago as a pot cleaner and dish washer at the old Barringer Hotel, Deas rose in his chosen profession to become executive chef of the Charlotte Athletic Club, Inc.

Very few chefs start the way I did," Deas stated. "Most go to school and an apprenticeship program. But going through the back door the way I did was helpful to me because I know the business from the ground floor."

It took him 10 years to work his way up through all the stations, he said, but on the way he learned to do a lot of things from scratch. Deas basically follows tradition in his cooking but from time to time he enjoys inventing something. One such dish is "Breast of Chicken Lori," named for his 13 year old daughter. It consists of chicken breast stuffed with diced ham, green pepper, onion, thyme, bread crumbs, egg yolk, and topped with Mornay sauce.

Deas said his best dishes are soups and casseroles. He makes over 100 varieties of soup, with his favorite being an Italian soup of seafood in a tomato base.

Although many soups start with fresh ingredients, many others can be made with leftovers, or two different soups can be combined to create a third, he said.

Deas likes the challenge of being a chef, doing something different every day, and pleasing people. "Most chefs enjoy being complimented on their food," he remarked, and Deas is probably no different in that respect.

A couple of challenges Deas has found at the Charlotte Athletic Club are dealing with different nationalities and serving a "diet special" every day. Although the club is health-oriented, Deas said

most members haven't changed their diets. His staff has been working with the Heart Association to come up with dishes that are good for the heart and blood pressure. The basic idea is to stay away from grease by cooling stocks and then removing the fat that rises to the top; and by heating foods in stock rather than butter.

Despite his good intentions, however, the favorites at the club continue to be Chicken Oscar, Dover Sole, and Charleston Seafood Casserole, all rich in cream sauces. Deas is active in the local chefs' association, the Epicurean Club of Charlotte. Several months back, he was elected to his second two-year term as president. He is also a member of the United Chefs Association, the black chefs' association.

In preparation for the 1988 national chefs' convention, which will be held in Charlotte at the Adam's Mark Hotel, chefs from both Carolinas are compiling a cookbook as a fundraiser. Deas plans to include six soup, six chicken, and six beef dishes of his own in the book, which will be on sale to the public.

Since he works split shifts, Deas rarely cooks for his family. That chore is left in the hands of his wife, Lucille. Deas does, however, prepare dishes for big family occasions like parties and weddings.

He's been at the Charlotte Athletic Club for two years. Like many chefs, Deas has worked at a number of locations. He says the reason chefs move around so much is that the average stay of a manager is three years, and each new manager may want to bring his (or her?) own chef. "It's like politics," he added.

Deas grew up in a family of nine. A sister also cooks professionally.

Besides Lori, the Deases have two other children, Jowanda, seven, and Joseph III, who is 11. Chef Deas brought samples of the following recipes to the Post earlier this week. The staff loved every one of them, and the Oriental Friendship Soup worked wonders on my cold!

ORIENTAL FRIENDSHIP SOUP

In the Orient, a variety of one dish meals cooked and served at the table are called friendship dishes. This is one of my favorites.

- 1 Tbsp. cornstarch
- 4 c. beef stock
- 2 Tbsp. soy sauce
- 4 green onions, sliced
- 4 oz. regular onions, sliced thinly
- 1 1/2 lbs. beef, sliced paper thin
- 1 c. diced celery
- 10 oz. fresh spinach leaves, washed and torn into small pieces
- Pepper to taste
- 1 pkg. or can chow mein noodles

- 2 c. very fine egg noodles, cooked and drained

In a large bowl combine the cornstarch with beef broth and soy sauce; set aside. Saute onions in 3 Tbsp. peanut oil til limp. Push aside, add more oil, and brown beef on both sides. Add celery, spinach, and beef stock mixture. Mix well, season with pepper, and cook over medium heat for 10 minutes. Add chow mein noodles and cooked egg noodles. Cook 5 minutes longer, til vegetables are just tender, not overcooked.

Tip: Use sirloin of beef. This is a meal in itself. Serves 6.

NEW ORLEANS CHICKEN AND OKRA GUMBO

This is a good summer outdoors dish with Louisianians. The word gumbo is taken from the Bantu word for okra. The dish is traditionally thickened with okra and file powder, which is made from ground dried sassafras leaves.

- 1 (3 lb.) fryer, disjointed
- 10 oz. onions, diced
- 1 c. smoked ham
- 2 Tbsp. bacon drippings
- 2 1/2 lbs. fresh tomatoes
- 20 oz. fresh sliced okra
- 8 c. hot water
- 1/4 oz. diced parsley
- 1/4 tsp. dried thyme

1 pod red pepper or 1/4 tsp. cayenne
1 tsp. file powder (optional)
3 c. cooked rice

Divide chicken into 21 pieces, wash and wipe dry. Saute onions and ham in bacon drippings over low heat til onions are tender. Add chicken and fry until golden. Mix in tomatoes and cook one minute. Add remaining ingredients except file powder and rice. Bring to a boil, lower heat, and simmer covered for one hour. Check, cook 30 minutes more. Add file powder. Put rice into 6 soup bowls. Ladle gumbo over rice. Serves 6.

LOBSTER AND CRABMEAT RAGOUT

- 3 Tbsp. diced shallots
- Green spring onions
- 1/4 c. diced green peppers
- 1/4 c. butter or margarine
- 3 Tbsp. flour
- 1/4 tsp. grated nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp. Worcestershire
- Cayenne (1 dash only!)
- Salt, pepper to taste
- 3/4 c. whole milk
- 2 (6 oz.) lobster tails
- 2 c. lump crabmeat, cleaned
- 1 c. heavy cream

Soak shallots in 1 c. whole milk. Saute green onions and green peppers in butter in large sauce pan. Mix in flour to form a roux. Cook one minute, add nutmeg, Worcestershire, cayenne, salt, pepper, and 1/2 c. milk. Stir slowly, making sure you've turned heat down. Add 1/4 c. milk with shallots. Add lobster, crabmeat, and cream. Heat through.

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Chef Joe Deas
.....With ragout and gumbo

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