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JOHN R. NELSON • SECTION EDITOR • 845-437-4836 • jnelson@poughkeepsiejournal.com

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AT YOUR SERVICE

Personal CHEFS

AMY WINN
FOR THE POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL

There are few luxuries more iconic than the full-time, live-in private chef, but employing a household kitchen staff isn't always feasible. For busy and discerning families, another option to consider is personal chef service.

The field is growing, as many culinary professionals decide to go into business for themselves — including quite a few chefs with ties to the mid-Hudson Valley.

Donna Douglass, chef-owner of Central Valley, Orange County-based What's Cooking, said her clients all have different lifestyles. These may include families with parents who have demanding professional lives, yet still want to serve their children fresh, home-cooked meals; gourmets who want to take advantage of local products but who don't want the bother of cooking every day; and those who are looking for tasty but lower-fat or vegetable-based options for health reasons.

In addition to being a Culinary Institute of America graduate, an experienced chef and cooking teacher, Douglass is also a certified health coach.

"My service is about cooking food, but also education and awareness about health. It's a lifestyle," Douglass said. "(The business) came out of having a passion for food and wanting to make a difference in people's lives, and my own life as well."

Candy Wallace, founder and execu-

SEE CHEFS, 2G

3 personal chefs who work in the mid-Hudson Valley



DONNA DOUGLASS
Chef-owner of What's Cooking



ANDREW CORRIGAN
Lantern and Llama personal chef/catering service



DANIELLE FRAGALA
CIA graduate and chef with Your Culinary Experience

INSIDE ON 2G:
How to hire a personal chef

JOURNAL PHOTO BY SPENCER AINSLEY



EntréeVous

FROM THE CIA IN HYDE PARK



DOUGLASS MILLER welcomes your questions and comments. Send them to life@poughkeepsiejournal.com

Make beer your beverage of choice this Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is fast approaching. It is a time when many families and friends sit down together to enjoy food and beverages.

I am going to enjoy dinner with my family in Endicott, Broome County. Along with the turkey and fun accompaniments, we enjoy apple cider, wine, cocktails and even Kool-Aid. And, in a nod to tradition that you might find surprising, we will drink beer as well.

The food and beverages enjoyed on Thanksgiving have evolved over the years, and what you might eat and drink today is very different from the first Thanksgiving in 1621.

If you and your household enjoy drinking beer on Thanksgiving, you are keeping one of the oldest holiday traditions alive.

You guessed it — at the first Thanksgiving, the Pilgrims did not

drink cocktails or wine, but beer.

How did beer become the beverage of choice? It boils down to supply and demand.

The Mayflower set sail from England on Sept. 6, 1620. During the long voyage, the passengers ate biscuits, dried meat and pickled vegetables.

SEE BEER, 2G



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Editor's Note

The Books page has moved from Hudson Valley Connoisseur to Smart Life. Find all book-related content on **page 51**.

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CHEFS • COMMITTED TO CARING FOR CLIENTS' WELL-BEING

CONTINUED FROM 1G

tive director of the American Personal and Private Chef Association, said this attitude is typical of her group's members, in that a service personality is as important as culinary skill.

"We love taking care of people. The food is wonderful, but beyond that, we're deeply, personally committed to clients' well-being and the quality of their lives," Wallace said.

Special food needs

For those with food-related medical concerns, a personal chef can save not only a huge amount of time, but also alleviate worry.

CIA graduate Danielle Fragala was teaching gluten-free cooking classes when she realized there was a need for something more. She began working as a personal chef in 2004, and has since come to specialize in serving clients with food sensitivities, allergies or other dietary issues.

The response has been considerable: Her Putnam County-based business, Your Culinary Experience, now employs a co-chef and is looking to hire two more chefs soon. The chefs consult frequently with nutritionists and medical personnel to help create a holistic approach to health.

"Our clients really need us in a different way than as a luxury service. (Even in times of economic difficulty), some would rather give up something else than our services, because they can't run to a restaurant or get takeout when they have food allergies. Especially if they are working full-time; it takes time to read labels and cook everything from scratch," Fragala said.

Douglass and Fragala said their visit schedule, the number of meals and the specific flavors and foods depend largely on the clients' budgets, needs and preferences, and are highly customizable.

Speaking broadly, the normal routine for meal service is for the chef to let herself into a client's home with gro-

Resources

► **American Personal & Private Chef Association**, 800-644-8389, www.personalchef.com

► **Andrew Corrigan**, Lantern and Llama Catering, 718-415-4351, http://lanternandllama.com

► **Donna Douglass**, What's Cooking, 845-548-6520, http://whatscookingforyou.com

► **Danielle Fragala**, Your Culinary Experience, 914-261-4121, www.yourculinaryexp.com

ceries purchased expressly for the client that same day; use a combination of her own equipment and the client's to prepare a certain number of meals, which are then portioned and packaged for storage in the refrigerator or freezer; clean the kitchen back to how she found it; and depart.

Restaurant at home

For clients who love the food in restaurants but not everything else, personal chefs also can bring professionally prepared food right to your kitchen. This can mean dinner parties in which hosts spend more time with their guests, intimate at-home cooking education, or other gourmand-centered experiences.

A graduate of Bard College and Le Cordon Bleu, among other culinary training programs, Andrew Corrigan provides catering and personal chef service through his Brooklyn-based business, Lantern and Llama. He provides the meal support services described above, but also especially enjoys creating the "chef's table" experience in clients' homes.

"My customers are people who eat out two to four times per week, are used to spending a lot, have a large entertainment budget, like nice

restaurants, and are savvy about food culture," Corrigan said, especially those who appreciate the seasonal, locally sourced ingredients his cooking style emphasizes.

When he comes to a home to cook for the evening, he provides an entertainment element that creates a more personal experience than going to a restaurant, he said.

"(Clients) can choose the wines and interact with the chef throughout the evening. Whereas, at a restaurant, you might have the waiter's ear for a few minutes, but not all night, and that's not the chef," Corrigan said.

Bard professor and Barrytown resident Bill Mullen met Corrigan as a student. Now, he is a frequent client. Mullen said having a personal chef helps him offer better hospitality to his guests, be they professional college visitors or personal friends.

"Andrew clearly takes pride in my not lifting a finger

as his client, and in leaving me free to be concerned only with my guests. He brings everything he needs for the dinner, and takes it all away again at the end and leaves my house quite clean," Mullen wrote in an e-mail.

There is also the advantage of personalization: "Andrew is good about using the serving platters and other possessions I've inherited from my family and enjoy displaying, so my own touch is on the presentation."

"He interacts very personally with my guests, particularly when there is a contingent that doesn't leave his side in the kitchen. He clearly enjoys this 'show' part of his business, and I am always happy to see my 'foodie' friends enjoy the show," Mullen said.

Amy Winn is a freelance writer. Reach her at life@poughkeepsiejournal.com.

Donna Douglass, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, is an experienced chef, cooking teacher and certified health coach.

Courtesy photo



How to hire a personal chef

For families looking to consult with and possibly hire a personal chef, the American Personal and Private Chef Association website, personalchef.com, is a great place to start.

Candy Wallace, founder and executive director, describes her group as a "national trade association for professional, personal and private chefs."

The website is a resource for potential clients as well as chefs, with an extensive database that provides names and contact information for chefs based on what counties they say they serve. However, Wallace said there is no substitute for an in-person interview and basic investigation.

"When interviewing, you definitely want to meet in person to assess the personal chemistry. You want to see a resume, with references, and check those references. The chef should be able to show proof he or she has a business license, safe food handling certifications and general liability insurance. Our members carry, at minimum, \$2 million general liability policies. You'll want to see affiliations with trade associations and professional groups; people who are part of groups are more likely to keep up their skills and with trends. Look for testimonial letters, a short biography and/or press clippings. It's also helpful for clients to receive and keep copies of those documents for reference," Wallace advised.

Further, each client should fill out a thorough assessment document, provided by the chef, before or during the first meeting. The assessment discusses personal likes/dislikes, allergies, sensitivities, how much or little the client wants to participate in the cooking, preferred shopping venues and more.

After the meeting, the client should receive a copy of the official service agreement, which lays out all details, including fees and specifications.

Once the deal is made, the partnership begins, Wallace said.

"(For some clients, we are an) extension of the family. They are trusting us with intimate information," Wallace said. "Communication and disclosure is imperative for any personal chef to supply what clients need and want, to help clients feel supported and happy. The more forthcoming the clients are with information, the better job the chef can do."

Terms you should know

► **Private chefs** are employees for one client, often cooking in the home three times a day, and subject to the client's professional, social, travel and family schedules. They frequently live in the home and may also supervise other staff. The role may also require a significant understanding of protocols and etiquette for business or diplomatic situations.

► **Personal chefs** own and operate their own businesses, with multiple clients, supplying on-site meal support to (usually) one client per day. They select their own clients, schedule their own time and are more of an independent contractor.

► **Caterers** use off-site, government-approved kitchen facilities for food preparation and perhaps cooking as well.

BEER • GO THE TRADITIONAL WAY THIS THANKSGIVING AND ENJOY A FROSTY COLD ONE

CONTINUED FROM 1G

The beverage of choice was beer because it was safer to drink than water. Water was often contaminated with bacteria or other microorganisms, but the alcohol in the beer ward off things that could make one sick.

Historians discuss that one of the reasons why the Mayflower landed in Cape Cod Bay was that beer supplies were getting low and the sailors had to start rationing the beverage.

Even though other alcoholic beverages were on board the ship, beer was the beverage of the homeland.

In fact, when the Pilgrims planned the layout and construction of buildings for their new colony, they in-

cluded a brewery in their plans.

The new colonists practiced various trade skills. One was a cooper — a person who makes and repairs barrels. The cooper in Plymouth was a crew member on the Mayflower who decided to stay in the New World rather than return home with his fellow sailors. The cooper crafted the barrels in which the first beer in the New World could be stored.

Once the Mayflower hit land and the settlers were trying to establish the new colony, supplies of beer and food were limited.

The first year was very hard on the settlers. Illness and death were prevalent in the colony. In the spring of 1621, Squanto, a Native American

who spoke English, taught the settlers how to thrive off the land.

One crop the settlers immediately planted was barley, which they had brought on the voyage. Due to the barley's limited supply, the settlers learned how to grow corn with Squanto's help.

We do not know the exact day-to-day life of the colonists. But we do know they were accustomed to drinking beer.

Therefore, it is safe to assume that part of the barley and corn they grew went into the production of beer. This beer was key to their survival in a foreign land. Similar to the sea voyage, it would protect them from water-borne bacteria.

You might ask, "What was this

beer like?" The beer was a barley and corn-based ale and would have spoiled quickly because, of course, pasteurization was not developed for another 240 years. It was a heavier style beer that might be considered a forerunner to stout or porter-style beer that we enjoy today.

Women and children would have consumed this beverage alongside the men as part of their daily lives.

Children commonly drank beer that was low in alcohol content for nutrition and health reasons.

If you are wondering, fresh and hard cider was not consumed at the first Thanksgiving. Apples — synonymous with the fall harvest in New England today — are not indigenous to the Americas. The first apple or-

chards were not planted in the region until a few years later, in 1625.

Often, the conversation around the holidays is about which wine to pair with the food. Save yourself the trouble and be a traditionalist. Have a nice cold frosty beer and do just as the Pilgrims did back in 1621.

The Entrée Vous column appears every Sunday. Douglass Miller is a lecturing instructor in hospitality and service management at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park. Miller serves as maître d' instructor in the college's Escoffier Restaurant. A 1989 CIA graduate, Miller is a certified hospitality educator and a certified specialist of spirits. He is an expert on the subject of cocktails and mixology.



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