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## Restaurants

### Local Chefs Share Specialties

By Mary Klest

Executive chefs are more than cooks. They are sniffers and tasters, ambassadors and artists. In the Barrington area chefs have access to fresh food from around the world or around the corner. With Chicago's culinary reputation extending across the globe these chefs understand the versatility of food and the business of pleasing palettes. Whether it is pride or persistence, they seek perfection when it comes to serving their customers. Barrington has exceptional dining opportunities to choose from.



Sang Lee, executive chef at Nozumi in South Barrington, was graduated from the Cooking Hospitality Institute of Chicago. He started his career at Moto restaurant in Chicago and has worked in several Japanese restaurants in the city. At Nozumi Sang prepares Asian fusion, a mix of Asian foods with added ingredients like jalapeño peppers soaked for hours before serving in a Satori roll. Presentation is part of the experience. He arranges colorful meals

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on white plates creating a multisensory experience for the diner. He interacts with six to seven vendors a day who are delivering everything from table linens to vegetables to fish. "We get fresh fish daily from the best vendors in the city, which they get by flight each day."

He's not shy about asking his customers what they like or dislike. "We learn from our customers. I always prepare the food as if it were to be served directly to my family." He feeds the servers as well. "They connect better with the customers if they've tasted it."

Ted Stay is the executive chef at the Park Avenue Wine Bar and McGonigal's Irish Pub in Barrington, two distinct restaurants that share one kitchen. Having worked at the Four Seasons in Chicago and restaurants in Lake Forest and Lake Zurich, Ted says he was up for the challenge. "The owners' enthusiasm and positive attitude gave me the inspiration to go ahead."

He describes himself as a "traditional" chef able to cook with fresh, locally grown ingredients. In the Wine Bar his favorite dish is the Nori wrapped Sea Scallops with Green Tea Soba Noodles. In the Irish Pub, it's fish and chips. Both restaurants are family owned and casual. The Wine Bar environment is more sophisticated and urban in its decor. Ted likes to expand his palette as well as that of his



customers. "The people in Barrington are always willing to try new menu items," he says. Dining trends observed revolve around healthy eating. "People consider what they are putting into their body. They care about portion size, how it's prepared and where the ingredients come from." He's seen an increase in vegetarian dishes and less gluten dishes. For him, happy employees make happy customers, so the feeling at both restaurants is "be happy here."

Jesus Alvarez, executive chef at Mia Francesca's Famiglia in Barrington, has been working in restaurants since he was a teenager. From dish washer to server to sous chef to chief chef, Alvarez loves working with food. "We don't scream like on those competitive cooking shows. We always help each other." Forty to 50 people are on the payroll at the Barrington restaurant. Of the restaurant's clientele Alvarez says, "People here have traveled around the world and tasted lots of different dishes. They know what good food is."

The menu changes every two weeks with specials selected, ordered and prepared by Alvarez daily. "That's what I like about being a chef. We get to create something new each day." Lasagna with meat sauce is a favorite at this Italian Restaurant. And so is the Lentil soup. "People who say they don't like lentils, like our lentil soup," he says. Asked so many times for recipes by his repeat customers, he decided to teach a cooking class. In addition to his nearly 12-hour, five days a week job, it is still a pleasure for him to spend time with his customers.

For those who don't want to go out for a meal, Kathy Pederson, chef and owner of On Occasion Catering, will bring it to them and their guests anytime, anywhere. For years Kathy worked out of her home in her own kitchen supplying clients with fresh, made-from-scratch gourmet food. She worked for other caterers, including Levy in Chicago and studied under influential chefs before opening her own business.



She believes it's more than delicious food that makes for a pleasant dining experience. "It's got to look fantastic, be stress free and just right for that client on that day." She offers customers a complete menu with additional services including tents, candles, flowers and servers. "We take the word 'cater' very seriously. It's a lot more than taking food out of a

box." She personalizes the experience by visiting customers in their home or business environment. She attends 85 percent of the events planned. Pederson rents out her professional kitchen and storefront location in Palatine for company team building events, showers and family gatherings.

Nicola Torres, executive chef at Millrose Restaurant in South Barrington, studied culinary arts while attending a hotel management school in his hometown of Bari, Italy. He traveled to northern Italy, Belgium and Brussels learning classic cooking techniques. He held jobs in some fine hotels where he assisted the corporate chef and managed the executive dining rooms. At Millrose, customers come for his comfort food. Baby back ribs and oven poached salmon are favorites. Nicola says, "Some of our customers are so loyal they have become like family here."

To satisfy every diner, he says, "You have to put your heart and soul into it." He says people are looking for authentic, simple flavors. Menus are available at the restaurant's bar area as well,

where they serve Two Brothers beer on tap. When the holidays approach, Nicola gets ready for parties in the restaurant's banquet rooms. Unlike at a hotel, many of the faces are familiar to him year round.

*Sources:*

**Millrose:** 847-382-7673

**Nozumi:** 847-783-0001

**On Occasion Catering:** 847-963-6700

**Francescas:** 847-277-1027

**McGonigal's Pub:** 847-277-7400

**Park Ave Wine Bar & Merchant:** 847-382-3900



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