

Personal chef gives the gift of thyme

By Lauren Weber, The Press-Tribune



Tim Lloyd/ Special to The Press-Tribune
Perry McCown, owner of Thyme is Precious, a personal chef business, turned his passion for cuisine into a career and now caters to the Roseville, Granite Bay and surrounding areas.



Personal chefs aren't just for the rich and famous these days. They're becoming more common in many middle class homes because of affordability, convenience, a slightly glamorous status and of course, restaurant-quality cuisine.

Perry McCown, a Roseville resident, is a professional personal chef, catering to the cooking needs of residents in Roseville, Granite Bay, Rocklin and surrounding communities through his business, Thyme is Precious.

McCown's endeavor didn't begin in a culinary school or in a restaurant as a chef. Instead it started with a nudge from a soccer mom and a love of cooking that developed from his mother.

For 13 years he worked in the restaurant industry, serving food and cleaning dishes, but never as a cook. Restaurant cooking never interested him, he said.

"I have room for creativity," McCown said of being a personal chef. "It allows me to have fun with that (cooking)."

For 10 years McCown worked with his father in the fiber optics field – something that never really interested him either. And now for the past two years he's operated his personal chef company serving up dishes for small dinner parties, intimate dinners for two, a week's worth of meals for a family and larger events.

McCown used to be afraid of large dinner parties but said he's now hungry for them. Even so, small dinner parties are what he craves.

"They're intimate. I'm in total contact with the party," he said.

From shopping and cleaning to cooking and serving, McCown does it all. Starting with a client assessment, McCown is introduced to any food allergies, dislikes or diet restrictions a client may have.

"What do you like? What do you love? What do you not want to cross the threshold of your house?" McCown said he asks his clients. "I love to sell people with new flavors."

Within his personal recipe book are some of his favorites: Salmon Wellington and seafood pasta with white wine mizithra cream sauce. He also has recipes from one of his favorite Food Network chefs, Giada De Laurentiis. Some of his other recipes include pancetta green beans from Bon Appetit magazine, steaks with garlic Wasabi sauce and decadent desserts.

"You can't have a dinner party without dessert," he said.

McCown owes his appetite for cooking to his mother.

"I went to Mama U," he said jokingly. "She's my greatest influence food-wise."

Initially when McCown was interested in turning cooking into a career, his wife Jaynine was nervous he wouldn't enjoy cooking at home. But the opposite has happened. Perry said that he doesn't cook anything for clients until he's

tried it, likes it and his wife likes it. He's always experimenting with recipes at home and his family gets the tasty results.

"She's my recipe tester," Perry said of Jaynine's unofficial job.

Many of his menus for clients are a concoction of what the client wants, what the client wants to try from Perry's cookbook and things Perry enjoys cooking. But many times he strays from a recipe.

"When it gets busy (in the kitchen) it comes from your heart, not from the paper," he said.

Part of his goal as a personal chef is to give clients a taste of a stress-free dinner party or event.

"You should be able to host a party and feel like a guest," he said.

Candy Wallace, founder of the international American Personal & Private Chef Association, praised the personal chef business not only because of the stress relief it provides for clients, but also for the healthy food, saving time and the affordability.

"We can help them segue into healthy eating," she said. "It gives them the option to eat food from all-fresh ingredients."

The APPCA trains personal chefs, like Perry, with business skills, client discovery and how to introduce the business to the community. Many personal chefs have the culinary background and are looking for something more personal and flexible. She praised Perry's genuine care for his clients and his cooking.

"Perry is a very good cook," she said. "One of the things that struck me immediately about him is there's a quite gentleness about him."

Roseville resident Heidi Keaton is the woman responsible for introducing Perry to the personal chef business. Like Perry, she'd always had an interest in cooking and came across an article on personal chefs. She mentioned it to Perry and initially the two were going to partner up to form the company, but Keaton wasn't ready to devote so much time away from her young children.

A year into Thyme is Precious, Keaton became Perry's assistant chef, assisting with larger events. Keaton said that their personalities, strengths and weaknesses balance out and they complement each other in the kitchen. And added that Perry's passion radiates through his work.

"He is just a person who fully enjoys what he's doing," she said.

What: Thyme is Precious, personal chef business of Perry McCown

Info: www.thymeisprecious.com