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Chef du Jour: Career coach takes her own advice

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Shelley Nachum Courtesy (/ February 8, 2012)

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February 9, 2012

Name: Shelley Nachum

Title: Personal chef

Business: Short On Thyme Personal Chef Service, Delray Beach, 561-276-8539, ShortonThyme.com

Age: 50

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Years in business: Four

Food prepared: Healthy and nutritious cuisine

Background: Prior to becoming a chef, Nachum was a career coach who helped people find their niche in life. She'd often pose questions such as: "What are you passionate about?" or "What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?"

She decided to put herself to the same test and found her answers all revolved around food and cooking. Aside from various informal cooking classes, up to this point, she was self-taught. Trial and error in the kitchen and being an avid reader of cookbooks and food magazines prepared her for more formal training. She had read about the personal chef field years before, and in 2008 enrolled in an intensive course at the Culinary Business Academy, a cooking school in New Mexico that specializes in training personal chefs.

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Nachum did her homework before attending school. She settled on the business name, secured licensing and insurance and started a website. After graduating, she hit the ground running and has since developed her own niche. Her coaching continues, but now it's through educating people in healthy and nutritious eating habits and helping to reach dietary goals while preparing their food. Currently, she services clients in Palm Beach and Broward counties.

As of August, Nachum started her own gluten-free diet and now offers this option to her clients. The bulk of her business comes from meal planning. Chef Nachum prepares dinner entrees and portion packages them for clients' freezers to be heated throughout the week. She'll also prepare hors d'oeuvres or sit-down dinners for up to 20 people. She also conducts wine tastings and food pairing events. Romantic dinners for two are also a popular service.

As a member of the United States Personal Chef Association, Nachum was invited to participate in first lady Michelle Obama's Chefs Move To Schools initiative a few years ago. Nachum and 700 chefs representing 35 states volunteered to adopt local schools to help solve the childhood obesity epidemic by working with schools to teach kids about food, nutrition and cooking. Nachum continues giving back to the community by donating 10 percent of her sales to local food pantries, conducting cooking demos at the Palm Beach School District's health fairs and as a volunteer with Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Q: What motivates you as a personal chef?

A: My mission is to teach people about good nutrition. I am passionate about eating healthy and promoting awareness of our food supply. The obesity epidemic drives me to teach people. I find it very upsetting, especially when it comes to kids.

Q: What have you found to be one of the most under used ingredients?

A: Quinoa. Although it's been around for years, it's still fairly new to mainstream America. It's a complete protein, high in Omega 3 and 6, a good source of fiber, easy to make, nutritious and versatile. I like to cook it in carrot juice and add apples, parsley and toasted almonds or, for a more savory version, I add basil, sun-dried tomato and garlic.

Q: What's your idea of the perfect meal?

A: I made it last night. Roasted mahi-mahi, brown rice and sauteed bok choy with soy sauce. I'm not a gourmet cook. I enjoy simple, delicious, healthy food.

Q: If you weren't a personal chef, what would you be doing?

A: I have a degree in marketing, so I would probably be doing something in public relations or advertising. I'm also interested in grant writing.

Q: Who was your greatest food influence?

A: My grandmother, she cooked a lot and cooked well.

A: If you were limited to three herbs in your garden, what would you plant?

A: I do have an herb garden, so it would have to be rosemary, basil and thyme. I use those the most.

Q: Where could we find you on a day off?

A: Barnes & Noble. I go there three or four times a month, grab a coffee and read all the cooking and health magazines. It's my form of relaxation.

Q: What would you prepare for a client requesting a romantic dinner for Valentine's Day?

A: I have several options, depending on personal taste, but this one is popular: Roasted red pepper soup; mixed green salad with pears, bleu cheese, spicy pecans and a honey vinaigrette; orange-ginger-glazed Cornish hens with wild rice-stuffed acorn squash; and for dessert, miniature heart-shaped chocolate raspberry truffle cheesecake with whipped cream.

claire@claireperez.com

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