

Home cooking, at your service

By **Monica Deady**/ Staff Writer
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For Andrea Silver, personal chef business satisfies lifelong passion

By 9 a.m. on a recent summer day, Andrea Silver had done grocery shopping for two weeks' worth of meals.

By 10:30 a.m., she has roasted eggplant and cut up a pile of vegetables - and it's still early.

Silver, 30, who lives in Brookline, is not cooking for a party or her family. As a personal chef, she prepares foods for her clients in their homes, which they can eat until her next cooking date.

"It's really catered to exactly what the client wants," said Silver, as she perused the aisles of Whole Food Market in Brighton early one recent morning, buying some chicken, flowers and vegetables.

Silver started Sweet & Savory Personal Chef Services this spring, and in the few months it has been up and running, she already has seven clients. She starts her days at 8 a.m. when the markets open, and then spends the day cooking.

Cooking has been a lifelong passion for Silver, who, as a young girl growing up in Newton, used to help her mother cook.

"I've always had this passion for cooking," Silver said. "I had thought before of the profession ... of being a chef," she explained, but said she did not want to work in a restaurant environment.

But it wasn't until last fall that Silver turned her passion for cooking into a career opportunity. She taught kindergarten and second grade in Medfield for five years before deciding to switch gears. In September 2005, she began attending the Culinary Arts Program at Boston University, where she became ServSafe certified, or certified in food safety, and learned techniques and ideas from many local famous chefs.

Later, she took a class her father, a business professor at Curry College, was teaching, created a business plan and is now trying to grow her clientele.

With her knowledge, skills and love of cooking, Silver first sits down with her clients for a consultation. She takes an inventory of how many times a week they eat certain foods and even learns how the clients would like the food packaged in their refrigerators. She discusses allergies, intolerances and foods that clients just don't like. She asks about their kitchens, where she will be working and decides which of her own equipment she will need to bring.

"It really is catered to them," she said.

Clients can choose from a long menu that she has, or suggest their own recipes for her to make. They also can have different numbers of meals cooked for different-sized groups of people.

Amy Blumenthal hired Silver this past spring to enable her and her husband, Richard Geller, to enjoy meals while taking care of their two children and running two businesses.

"We have two kids, two companies, too little time," Blumenthal said. "We're always really multitasking work and childrearing, and there's not a lot of time to do things like cooking and putting good meals on the table ... We'd order takeout, and it just seemed like we were doing it too much."

Personal chefs are a growing industry, according to a survey conducted by the American Personal Chef Association. As of June 2004, there were reportedly 8,000 operating personal chefs in the United States, serving about 72,000 clients.

The business, the APCA said, generates more than \$300 million annually. The organization also predicted that by 2009, there would be nearly 20,000 operating personal chefs in the country.

Silver's fees range from \$275 for five entrees, with four servings of each dish, to \$200 for three entrees with two servings, plus the cost of groceries.

She emphasized that communication is key between her and clients, in case they do not like a specific dish or have a request for a certain recipe.

Being a personal chef, one would think Silver is a master in her own kitchen, too, but she laughs that she is often busy, too, making it hard to cook for her and her fiancé. She does, however, try to make dinner on Sunday evenings, to try out new recipes.

And her clients are thankful for that.

"It's like you're eating in a gourmet restaurant, but you're eating in your own house," Blumenthal says.

For more information, visit sweetandsavorychef.com.

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Raspberry-Apricot Buckle

Created by Andrea Silver

Serves 8-10

A buckle is a cake mixed with fresh fruit and then topped with a streusel topping.

For the Streusel:

1/3 cup all-purpose flour

1/2 cup sugar

1/2 stick cold unsalted butter, cut into pieces

1/2 teaspoon of cinnamon

Pinch salt

For the Cake:

1 1/3 cups all-purpose flour

1/4 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 1/2 sticks unsalted butter, softened

3/4 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1/2 teaspoon almond extract

3 large eggs

3/4 lb. firm, ripe fresh apricots (about 4 large), halved, pitted and cut into 3/4-inch pieces (yield 2 cups)

2 cups fresh raspberries

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350F. Grease a 10-by-2-inch round baking dish with butter.

To make the streusel:In a small bowl, mix all the streusel ingredients together using a pastry cutter or your fingertips until large clumps form. Refrigerate until ready to use.

To make the cake:Sift the flour, baking powder and salt into a bowl and set aside. Using a stand mixer or handheld mixer, beat the butter and sugar together on medium speed until the mixture is pale and fluffy. Beat in the vanilla and almond extracts. Beat in the eggs, one at a time, being sure to incorporate one egg before adding the next. On low speed, add the flour mixture and beat until just combined. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold in half of the apricots and half of the raspberries.

Spread the cake batter into the prepared pan and top with the remaining fruit. Sprinkle the reserved streusel topping over the fruit. Bake buckle until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean and the streusel is crisp and golden, about 55-60 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature with ice cream.