



Staff photo by Raul R. Rubiera
Mei Parker is a personal chef. She goes to people's homes and prepares meals that can be frozen and reheated for a quick

What's for dinner?

■ Chef Mei Parker uses her clients' tastes to create easy meals for them.

By Jennifer Plotnick
Staff writer

Your life has become busy. You work full speed then rush to collect your children from day care.

You don't get home until 6 p.m. and realize you forgot to shop for groceries. So you head back out for a not-so-healthy meal of chicken nuggets and fries.

Life doesn't have to be this way. You can have healthy, fresh meals as well as quality time around the dinner table while pursuing your career.

You just need a little help. Call "Kitchen Goddess to the Rescue."

Chef Mei Parker opened Taste of Home Personal Chef Service in Fayetteville in April.

"Personal cheffing is all about helping people save time," Parker said. The service "not only ensures the family is eating good nutritious meals, but it also brings the family together to take a pause, regroup, and spend some precious moments with one another."

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Chef

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Parker's clients don't have to plan menus, shop for groceries or prepare the meals. She "rescues" one client at a time.

Personal chef services

Aromas of cooking chicken basted with caramel sauce, ginger and garlic filled Joe and Linda Christopher's house on Monday afternoon.

Except for pausing for a nibble here and there, the Christophers kept working. They operate Ashton Consultants, Inc., which manages workers compensation claims, out of their home.

Parker spent a full day in the Christophers' kitchen preparing five meals and side dishes from fresh ingredients. She grows many herbs in her garden.

For about a year, the Christophers looked for a company that would create custom meals for them. Now, they ask Parker to prepare menus about every six weeks.

"It's been wonderful for us," said Linda Christopher.

"You get five-star quality," added Joe Christopher.

After the holidays, they asked Parker to create meals with smaller portions, lots of vegetables, more grains and fewer carbohydrates.

"We don't like heavy gravies," Linda Christopher said. "Those are the things we talk about at the beginning."

Parker developed a menu



meal later.

Staff photo by Raul R. Rubiera

Mei Parker, left, visits with Joe and Linda Christopher of Gray's Creek after preparing meals for

Parker said. She started with the mundane tasks of peeling onions and garlic.

Once she started culinary school, Parker said she realized "My mom had already started me on the right track."

Parker graduated from the Culinary Business Academy in Atlanta and is part of the U.S. Personal Chef Association.

Prices and priorities

Parker asks potential clients to consider how much time they spend cooking or how many fresh ingredients they let spoil because they don't cook.

Parker's personal chef menus consist of five entrees and a side dish to accompany each dish. She charges a flat rate for the service. The cost of groceries is extra.

She charges \$250 for 10 meals, \$300 for 20 meals and \$325 for 30 meals. Depending on the menus, Parker's cooking classes start at \$45 per person, and she coaches about six people at a time.

"I'm happiest when I'm feeding people and their bellies are full," Parker said.

To learn more, go to www.tasteofhomepcs.com or call Parker at 489-5552.

Anyone can sign up for her monthly e-newsletter of receive kitchen tips, recipes, books and information about foods from different countries.

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for the Christophers including dishes from Morocco, Vietnam, Italy, regions of America and the Mediterranean. The meals included apple cider-glazed pork tenderloin, roast vegetable and chick pea couscous, and Vietnamese caramel chicken.

Usually, she won't repeat a dish for at least six months, but the Christophers love her roasted vegetable lasagna so much they requested it again.

The meals went into disposable containers that can go straight from the freezer to the oven or microwave.

Dinner parties, classes

Parker also provides romantic dinners, group cooking classes and grocery shopping. She also leads interactive dinner parties in which guests work with Parker to create the food for

the party.

For busy moms on the go, she has created the "Magical Meals" service. Friends gather and assemble their raw ingredients then take them home to refrigerate and cook later.

In November, Sharon Lewis hired Parker to prepare hors d'oeuvres, salads and dessert for 12 neighbors who went to her house to play cards.

"I work full time and really don't have time in the afternoon to pull together food for a party," Lewis said. Knowing Parker would prepare the food and clean up afterward "was really appealing for me."

The women from Lewis' event were quickly raving about Parker. One neighbor who couldn't attend that night is now planning to use Taste of

Home for a party, Lewis said.

Darla and Mark Davis run an executive concierge service, Links to Success, in Fayetteville. Darla Davis said she is always looking for qualified vendors for her clients. She has steered them to Parker.

"The service is a tremendous benefit for busy professionals," said Davis. "Her design and decorating are fabulous. She really puts the touch of class in."

Corporate to kitchen

Parker started her love affair with cooking in her mother's kitchen in Malaysia when she was 11 years old.

"To start learning to cook, you need to learn the basics,"