

*The region's authority on refined living*

JOHN R. NELSON • SECTION EDITOR • 845-437-4836 • jrnelson@poughkeepsiejournal.com

Poughkeepsie Journal • poughkeepsiejournal.com/life

**AT YOUR SERVICE**

For busy families, a private chef service can be customized to fit any lifestyle, budget and personal preference

# Personal CHEFS

**AMY WINN**

FOR THE POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL

There are few luxuries more iconic than the full-time, live-in private chef, but employing a household kitchen staff isn't always feasible. For busy and discerning families, another option to consider is personal chef service.

The field is growing, as many culinary professionals decide to go into business for themselves — including quite a few chefs with ties to the mid-Hudson Valley.

Donna Douglass, chef-owner of Central Valley, Orange County-based What's Cooking, said her clients all have different lifestyles. These may include families with parents who have demanding professional lives, yet still want to serve their children fresh, home-cooked meals; gourmets who want to take advantage of local products but who don't want the bother of cooking every day; and those who are looking for tasty but lower-fat or vegetable-based options for health reasons.

In addition to being a Culinary Institute of America graduate, an experienced chef and cooking teacher, Douglass is also a certified health coach.

"My service is about cooking food, but also education and awareness about health. It's a lifestyle," Douglass said. "(The business) came out of having a passion for food and wanting to make a difference in people's lives, and my own life as well."

Candy Wallace, founder and execu-

3 personal chefs who work in the mid-Hudson Valley



**DONNA DOUGLASS**  
Chef-owner of  
What's Cooking



**ANDREW CORRIGAN**  
Lantern and Llama  
personal chef/catering  
service



**DANIELLE FRAGALA**  
CIA graduate and chef  
with Your Culinary  
Experience

**INSIDE ON  
2G:**  
How to hire  
a personal  
chef

JOURNAL PHOTO BY  
SPENCER AINSLEY

SEE CHEFS, 2G

## CHEFS • COMMITTED TO CARING FOR CLIENTS' WELL-BEING

CONTINUED FROM 1G

tive director of the American Personal and Private Chef Association, said this attitude is typical of her group's members, in that a service personality is as important as culinary skill.

"We love taking care of people. The food is wonderful, but beyond that, we're deeply, personally committed to clients' well-being and the quality of their lives," Wallace said.

**Special food needs**

For those with food-related medical concerns, a personal chef can save not only a huge amount of time, but also alleviate worry.

CIA graduate Danielle Fragala was teaching gluten-free cooking classes when she realized there was a need for something more. She began working as a personal chef in 2004, and has since come to specialize in serving clients with food sensitivities, allergies or other dietary issues.

The response has been considerable: Her Putnam County-based business, Your Culinary Experience, now employs a co-chef and is looking to hire two more chefs soon. The chefs consult frequently with nutritionists and medical personnel to help create a holistic approach to health.

"Our clients really need us in a different way than as a luxury service. (Even in times of economic difficulty), some would rather give up something else than our services, because they can't run to a restaurant or get takeout when they have food allergies. Especially if they are working full-time; it takes time to read labels and cook everything from scratch," Fragala said.

Douglass and Fragala said their visit schedule, the number of meals and the specific flavors and foods depend largely on the clients' budgets, needs and preferences, and are highly customizable.

Speaking broadly, the normal routine for meal service is for the chef to let herself into a client's home with gro-

**Resources**

► **American Personal & Private Chef Association**, 800-644-8389, [www.personalchef.com](http://www.personalchef.com)

► **Andrew Corrigan**, Lantern and Llama Catering, 718-415-4351, <http://lanternandllama.com>

► **Donna Douglass**, What's Cooking, 845-548-6520, <http://whatscookingforyou.com>

► **Danielle Fragala**, Your Culinary Experience, 914-261-4121, [www.yourculinaryexp.com](http://www.yourculinaryexp.com)

ceries purchased expressly for the client that same day; use a combination of her own equipment and the client's to prepare a certain number of meals, which are then portioned and packaged for storage in the refrigerator or freezer; clean the kitchen back to how she found it; and depart.

**Restaurant at home**

For clients who love the food in restaurants but not everything else, personal chefs also can bring professionally prepared food right to your kitchen. This can mean dinner parties in which hosts spend more time with their guests, intimate at-home cooking education, or other gourmand-centered experiences.

A graduate of Bard College and Le Cordon Bleu, among other culinary training programs, Andrew Corrigan provides catering and personal chef service through his Brooklyn-based business, Lantern and Llama. He provides the meal support services described above, but also especially enjoys creating the "chef's table" experience in clients' homes.

"My customers are people who eat out two to four times per week, are used to spending a lot, have a large entertainment budget, like nice

restaurants, and are savvy about food culture," Corrigan said, especially those who appreciate the seasonal, locally sourced ingredients his cooking style emphasizes.

When he comes to a home to cook for the evening, he provides an entertainment element that creates a more personal experience than going to a restaurant, he said.

"(Clients) can choose the wines and interact with the chef throughout the evening. Whereas, at a restaurant, you might have the waiter's ear for a few minutes, but not all night, and that's not the chef," Corrigan said.

Bard professor and Barrytown resident Bill Mullen met Corrigan as a student. Now, he is a frequent client. Mullen said having a personal chef helps him offer better hospitality to his guests, be they professional college visitors or personal friends.

"Andrew clearly takes pride in my not lifting a finger

Donna Douglass, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, is an experienced chef, cooking teacher and certified health coach.

Courtesy photo



as his client, and in leaving me free to be concerned only with my guests. He brings everything he needs for the dinner, and takes it all away again at the end and leaves my house quite clean," Mullen wrote in an e-mail.

There is also the advantage of personalization: "Andrew is good about using the serving platters and other possessions I've inherited from my family and enjoy displaying, so my own touch is on the presentation.

"He interacts very personally with my guests, particularly when there is a contingent that doesn't leave his side in the kitchen. He clearly enjoys this 'show' part of his business, and I am always happy to see my 'foodie' friends enjoy the show," Mullen said.

Amy Winn is a freelance writer. Reach her at [life@poughkeepsiejournal.com](mailto:life@poughkeepsiejournal.com).

**How to hire a personal chef**

For families looking to consult with and possibly hire a personal chef, the American Personal and Private Chef Association website, [personalchef.com](http://personalchef.com), is a great place to start.

Candy Wallace, founder and executive director, describes her group as a "national trade association for professional, personal and private chefs."

The website is a resource for potential clients as well as chefs, with an extensive database that provides names and contact information for chefs based on what counties they say they serve. However, Wallace said there is no substitute for an in-person interview and basic investigation.

"When interviewing, you definitely want to meet in person to assess the personal chemistry. You want to see a resume, with references, and check those references. The chef should be able to show proof he or she has a business license, safe food handling certifications and general liability insurance. Our members carry, at minimum, \$2 million general liability policies. You'll want to see affiliations with trade associations and professional groups; people who are part of groups are more likely to keep up their skills and with trends. Look for testimonial letters, a short biography and/or press clippings. It's also helpful for clients to receive and keep copies of those documents for reference," Wallace advised.

Further, each client should fill out a thorough assessment document, provided by the chef, before or during the first meeting. The assessment discusses personal likes/dislikes, allergies, sensitivities, how much or little the client wants to participate in the cooking, preferred shopping venues and more.

After the meeting, the client should receive a copy of the official service agreement, which lays out all details, including fees and specifications.

Once the deal is made, the partnership begins, Wallace said.

"(For some clients, we are an) extension of the family. They are trusting us with intimate information," Wallace said. "Communication and disclosure is imperative for any personal chef to supply what clients need and want, to help clients feel supported and happy. The more forthcoming the clients are with information, the better job the chef can do."

**Terms you should know**

► **Private chefs** are employees for one client, often cooking in the home three times a day, and subject to the client's professional, social, travel and family schedules. They frequently live in the home and may also supervise other staff. The role may also require a significant understanding of protocols and etiquette for business or diplomatic situations.

► **Personal chefs** own and operate their own businesses, with multiple clients, supplying on-site meal support to (usually) one client per day. They select their own clients, schedule their own time and are more of an independent contractor.

► **Caterers** use off-site, government-approved kitchen facilities for food preparation and perhaps cooking as well.