

Treat your guests to a catered holiday affair

BY SALLY D. KETCHUM
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One key to an amazing holiday party is exceptional food — a menu that is savvy about what the guests for the particular party will most enjoy.

Happily, if the party is catered by Traverse restaurants or if hosts treat their guests to dining out in the area's fine restaurants, menu choices are large and varied, and advice and consultation about the nature of the party are available so the chances of it being an amazing affair are nearly guaranteed.

Catering frees the host from the work of preparations, serving and clean-up. This, of course, enables host and hostess to enjoy the party themselves.

Catering the party means not only having food brought into the home and set up in attractive presentations, but also it might mean semi-catering — buying prepared foods and bringing them home for the hostess to design and present.

Today, entertaining outside the home is also a popular option. This means making reservations for a large party of friends and relatives and to dine out. (Make reservations as early as possible, one month ahead at the latest.)

While these methods of hosting have different advantages and different price ranges, they all work toward successful parties.

Many restaurants (some that cater) complement the Traverse area's rich history with their locations. Mary Jane Krumholz, owner and hostess of The Jordan Inn (536-9906), has an ever-changing European menu, including domestic and imported wines, along with other beverages. The East

Jordan Main Street location offers both in-home and take-out catering. A fresh idea: Jordan Inn's prepared box lunches featuring fresh roasted meats on artisan breads — just the thing for sitting around a fire after skiing. Krumholz says that much of the business that she has been enjoying has been in various forms of catering.

Both standard (and popular) small bites and innovative combinations are among the over 40 choices on The Jordan Inn's appetizer menu. Consider beef Stroganoff wontons, seared duck on toast, artichoke cheese dip or smoked salmon cakes. Like some other caterers, The Inn has per person prices for various sized servings and also offers a private meeting room with media capabilities besides the dining room.

North Centennial Inn in Maple City (formerly The Leelanau Country Inn) invites large parties to dine, accommodating clients with special prices, services and menu and service suggestions. The menu bespeaks fine dining and highlights regional ingredients in worldly dishes such as Peking duckling, leeks, mushrooms and cherries in a French crepe, finished with a cherry and Marsala wine sauce. Suttons Bay Bibb is combined with an aged Gouda in one salad, and greens with dried cherries and an Irish Cashel Bleu Cheese, walnuts and bacon in another.

North's Manager, Wesley Yard, said their most popular items are chicken in potato crust with a stone ground mustard sauce, broiled whitefish with saffron whipped potatoes and chipotle remoulade, sautéed beef tenderloin tips with port wine demi-glace

in a baked parmesan cheese basket. These are also relatively inexpensive. Of course, more exotic entrees such as wild game, lamb, foie gras, etc. are also on the menu. Small parties may be accommodated in a separate parlor, larger parties in the main dining room (228-5060).

Tapawingo, Ellsworth's famed restaurant, offers seating for up to 40 for private parties. Holiday menus feature such delicacies as venison loin with sweet potato mousseline and turnips or another seasonal entrée, duck presented in a small cassoulet of beans and vegetables. Jeremy Kittelson, formerly of Chicago's Blackbird, is now executive chef at Tapawingo.

Folgarelli's catering menu is rich in European imports; and, with no surprise to their regular customers, it offers many European imports, especially Mediterranean and Italian. The menus include appetizers, salads, entrees, a sub station and even breakfast. The Italian quiche, made with Asiago cheese, pancetta, roma tomatoes and Parmesan cheese is ready to bake, but also can be baked at the customer's home. At times the menu is understated; for instance Folgarelli's "Traditional Antipasto" is a layered feast with capicola ham prosciutto, provolone cheese, roasted artichokes hearts, Italian tuna, fresh celery, Genoa salami — topped with the "Marge's Italian Dressing." (941-7651 or info@folgarellis.com)

Grandview catering (932-9713) representing Bubba's and 310 and managed by Jen Foltz, specializes in creativity and artfully displayed presentations. Foltz says they excel in "flavor

combinations."

Their menus are testimony to flavor creativity. Consider the roast pecan gorgonzola pate, an appetizer; lime-dill dressing for a salad; or a grilled chicken entrée with a lemon, white wine, garlic, capers and mushroom sauce. Small plates offered include a tuna tartare with sesame and sweet soy sauce; and also mussels with ginger, sweet chili sauce and sake. Big Plates, eight of them, are served with the chef's choice of vegetable and starch (salad added extra). They include seared salmon fillet with chipotle-honey glaze or pan-seared bass with potato-mushroom lasagna in a creamy saffron-corn broth, and other gourmet entrees.



Traverse City's Folgarelli's catering menu is rich in European imports. The menu includes appetizers, salads, entrees, a sub station and even breakfast.

Clearly, the tradition of holiday feasting is alive, well and delicious in the Traverse area. As Grandview's Foltz suggests,

"Do good work, eat well, enjoy life!"
Sally Ketchum is a freelance writer and columnist.

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Tips for the perfect catered meal

A good caterer consults with clients about every element of party, even those beyond food-elements. Elements include food types, courses, special diet considerations, presentation, service and clean up. Here are catering tips that are useful, not only when dealing with caterers, but also for the host and hostess doing the party food themselves.

■ When considering hot and/or cold hors d'oeuvres, include the possibility of renting heated or chilled plates and chafing dishes. Surveying rental possibilities from silverware to centerpieces inspires many ideas.

■ If serving many different types of appetizers, aim for a balance among the types, tea sandwiches, crudites, dips, cheeses, hot bites, etc.

■ If serving only one appetizer, make it very special. A fine cheese is a good choice.

■ In presenting a buffet of food, keep the tallest food items at the back of the table. Presentations might include rows, half-circles of food, stacks, slices fanned from a large piece, etc. Avoid the boring.

■ Chef Robert Danhi of The Culinary Institute of America explains that the critical points of a buffet are shape, color, items, height, flavor, and texture.

■ Guests should not feel full after nibbling with drinks before dinner. The purpose of appetizers is just that — to evoke an appetite. Plan three to four bites per guest.

■ If small portions are to take the place of dinner, the food should be heavier, e.g. a serving station for a roast to be sliced very thinly. Plan on 18-20 bites for each guest.

■ Finally, and most importantly, work with your caterer. Be as specific as you can in explaining what you are aiming for. Detail your likes and dislikes and make priorities clear. Caterers enjoy working with their clients, and the consultations are hardly work.

— Sally D. Ketchum

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