

CHEF LISA REICHERT



COMPANY: Lisa An Reichert

EDUCATION: Allegheny College, Meadville, Pa., pre-medicine for two years; Middlesex County College, Edison, N.J., hotel and restaurant management.

Maybe the phrase to remember when you think about Lisa Reichert is “made with love.” That’s because love is one ingredient Lisa never forgets to stir in when she’s cooking.

“When I was growing up there was a lot of love and tradition when my family cooked,” Lisa says. “I carry that love with me when I cook.”

A centerpiece next to that love in Lisa’s family was food. No, make that good food.

Lisa grew up in Old Bridge, New Jersey – that’s the garden state – a fact not lost on her parents.

“We always had a huge garden full of fresh vegetables and some fruits. Lettuces, collard and mustard greens, beets, cabbage, squashes and cucumbers were just a few. Dad’s Jersey tomatoes were always so delicious. He also grew cantaloupe and honeydew.”

She says one year, her dad planted a different fruit tree for her, her older two sisters and her younger brother. Lisa’s was a peach tree. The taste causes her to take an annual trip during the peach season to Palisade, Colo. to “relive the incredible flavor of a ripe, freshly picked peach.”

Lisa says when she thinks back to her childhood, often the first memory is spending “so many days as a family in the kitchen. It was where we gathered and experienced life and broke bread with our friends and as a family. To this day my siblings and I celebrate the seasons and holidays with recipes passed down from mom and dad.”

Despite the large role food played in her childhood, animals landed a special place in her heart, too. She went to Allegheny College in northwestern Pennsylvania and spent two years intent on becoming a veterinarian. But when she returned home from her studies in 1981 she began to realize her love of cooking outweighed school and landed a job as a chef for the Hyatt hotel chain. It was enough to keep her from looking back at that vet career. Instead, she went to Middlesex County College in

New Jersey and studied hotel and restaurant management. The decision stuck and she worked for Hyatt for 14 years, eventually rising to executive sous chef in Beaver Creek, Colo.

In 1996, she moved to Glenwood Springs to give entrepreneurship a shot by opening a small deli and catering company that eventually became the 8th Street Deli – a hugely successful venture. And in 2004, she sold it for what she calls “a very nice price.”

After taking several months off, she returned to her love and began working as a substitute cook for the RE-1 Roaring Fork School District. That eventually became a full-time position and today she’s the kitchen manager for Highland Elementary School in Rifle, Colo.

“My career today is so much in line with my belief in cooking wholesome, unadulterated food which is good for the soul and body,” Lisa says. “To be able to expose school children to this and make it a standard is most gratifying.”

Lisa says it wasn’t until she was a young adult that she realized just how pervasive processed food had become. “My parents always cooked from scratch with only the freshest ingredients. I continued with that notion while working for Hyatt and at my deli.”

She remembers getting compliments for her good-tasting food, especially her turkey and roast sandwiches, which she roasted herself in her home. “I never really understood what they were experiencing until I tried some of the processed foods that people eat all the time. Not only was the taste inferior, but the ingredients were questionable.”

Lisa says today she tries to live her life with compassion for herself, the earth, her animal friends and others.

“I believe good food yields a healthy life. As a chef, I believe I can transcend my love of this life into my food and into those who eat it.”



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