



Country Club Boasts Most Excellent Chef

The Lake Arrowhead Country Club (LACC) had a position open for a new chef about one year ago. Kathleen Kirk, former owner of Casual Elegance in Agua Fria, was looking for a new challenge and a chance to meet new people, especially people who appreciate great food. She got the job and eased the staff through a smooth transition when she took over as executive chef.

“As a club, we are very blessed to have her here. She took over a terrific team that has been here for many years,” said Barry Robinson, chairman of the House Committee at LACC. “Among chefs, there is a tremendous amount of ego, but Kathleen has no ego. She wants to help people.”

As an example, Robinson mentioned a former dishwasher who was a hard worker, so Kirk began to train the dishwasher on cooking skills. “Now she does the prep work and desserts. She is an artist, and her special presentations are wonderful.

“Esteban, who does the ice carvings, has learned so much from Kathleen about creating buffet displays,” Robinson commented, citing other examples of Kirk’s ability to teach and inspire her team. “You can see the glow in their faces,” Robinson said. “It can be 120 degrees back there (in the kitchen) but they are so happy. It’s wonderful to see.”

Kirk works with a big crew, especially during the summer season. “They are all good guys,” she said

enthusiastically. We are really lucky. Each person has his own niche.”

As for her own specialty, Kirk said she likes most to do a lot of the baking. “I like mixing different doughs,” she said. The country club recently had a pizza night, and she was able to enjoy indulging in creating dough for the pizza crust. On the subject of gluten-free crust, Kirk said that working at a country club, as opposed to a restaurant, she is able to remember and keep track of specific members’ food sensitivities and restricted diets. However, she doesn’t have time to enter that information into a computer data base because her schedule in the kitchen is constant.

“We are dark only on Tuesday and Thursday evenings when no





The dining room of the Lake Arrowhead Country Club can accommodate up to 200 people. The room has a reputation for being the largest A-frame structure west of the Mississippi River.

The mild mountain weather draws members of the Lake Arrowhead Country Club outdoors, where they can enjoy fine cuisine at the snack bar as well as in the main dining room.





dinner is served. But breakfast and lunch are served seven days a week.” In addition, Kirk is responsible for feeding up to 20 employees when they eat in the staff lounge at the country club.

The main dining room accommodates 200 people, but on special occasions the staff has served up to 350 people (Father’s

Day lunch, for example) as diners arrive and leave at various times. “It requires a tremendous amount of skill and organization,” Robinson explained. “You have to know how to get people to get things done, whether you have a new or existing team.”

There is a certain element of “upstairs/downstairs” in Kirk’s

work day as well. In addition to the large-capacity dining room, there is a pub that seats 35 to 45 inside and 80 outside. The pool deck, veranda and snack bar on the lower level also are served by the same kitchen, enabling staff to get a good workout going up and down the stairs.

It helps that the various dining

areas share the same menu. “That helps bring down the size of our menu offerings, which brings up the quality of the food,” Kirk observed. “The members come here a lot, and they don’t want to see the same things on the menu over and over again.”

In addition to running the kitchen for the standard dining areas, Kirk oversees food for important special events, including but not limited to the Burger Bistro on Sunday evenings, weddings (for members only), fundraisers, Thanksgiving and Christmas (with traditional homemade tamales).

Then there are the groups (e.g., the Women’s Golf Association, the 9ers and others) who have an occasional soiree, tea party or retro ‘60s party.

With so many different events and varied menus, it is important for the country club to have an executive chef with Kirk’s abilities. “She is very talented, and she has a great culinary background and knowledge,” Robinson noted. “Her all-round knowledge of

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food is phenomenal. Kathleen's imagination and creativity bring it all together. In addition, it is wonderful when you have a personality who is well known in the mountains."

Kirk attributes her abilities to two important teachers. "My mother was a good cook and I learned a lot from her. Then I worked under Jan Morrison at Casual Elegance."

Kirk acquired other important skills when she worked for Paramount Pictures as a flight attendant on the studio's private jets. "The staff worked very hard, but there was always something to smile or laugh about," Kirk explained. She carries the same cheerful attitude with her in the kitchen of the country club. It helps also that she loves her profession.

"What I enjoy most about cooking is it provides the quickest satisfaction: the fact that people enjoy the food. It's nice to give them that instant gratifica-

tion." This in itself is rewarding for Kirk. But the "icing on the cake," so-to-speak, is that Kirk has "a ton of fun with desserts." She said she gets so excited about creating ice cream sandwiches with cookies made from scratch, cream puffs decorated with flowers, desserts served in champagne glasses.

What could be better than all of that? Well, add to Kirk's list of accomplishments and talents that she is a first level sommelier. With her special knowledge of wines, she plans "wine dinners" for the country club, pairing the right food with the perfect beverage. She has done the same thing for Oktoberfest, matching up various types of beer with seasonal meals.

With enthusiasm, Kirk is planning other food-focused events for country club members. It's another perfect pairing: Kirk's knowledge, experience and talent combined with people who enjoy fine wine and outstanding food. ■

Story and Photos By Heidi Fron



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Pete has been a Lake Arrowhead resident for over 20 years and has served on the Boards for Lake Arrowhead Chamber of Commerce, Blue Jay Jazz Foundation, ROTW School District Oversight Committee and Lake Arrowhead Film Festival. He is a welcomed professional at Lynne B. Wilson and Associates, Inc.



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