



Executive chef Jamie McFadden, Cuisiniers Catered Cuisine & Events

Caterer at Large

Jamie McFadden is on a mission to revitalize the art of home entertaining

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PHOTOS BY JOE BURBANK

On a recent late afternoon at Cuisiniers Catered Cuisine & Events in Winter Park the commercial kitchen is a beehive of activity. The room is warm from the ovens and pleasantly heavy with the sweet scents of baked tarts and cookies and the savory aromas of finely seasoned roasts.

Workers carefully set up platters of antipasti with precision. Others begin the inventory for an evening soiree: Shiny chafing dishes, luxurious table cloths, white plates, gleaming glassware and more are methodically checked and rechecked before being

packed into the sleek black Cuisiniers truck out front.

Welcome to Jamie McFadden's party central. In the middle of this carefully orchestrated swarm is the chef who has been serving Central Florida for 25 years. He effortlessly excels at key elements a client looks for in a caterer: All at once he is engaging with a single visitor, completely in tune the hustle and bustle around him and devoid of all ego.

READY, SET, CELEBRATE

Within a matter of weeks the holiday entertaining season will be in full



McFadden's perfect plum tart dazzles guests. Find the recipe at orlandosignature.com

swing. Now is the time to think about menus that dazzle, tabletops that sparkle and parties that sizzle. Holiday entertaining looks so easy on the Food Network and the pages of glossy magazines. So why, despite our Epicurean dreams, do we feel stuck in a paper-cup world? Perhaps you haven't found the right guide.

"I am trying to bring back the lost art of entertaining," says McFadden. "It's something our parents and grandparents flourished at on shoestring budgets. They probably spent less on restaurants but more time on simple thoughtful touches and traditional planning steps that guaranteed a memorable event."

McFadden remembers sitting on the kitchen counter top at age five or six and watching his mother create a Caesar salad from scratch.

"Everything from preparing the lettuce to mashing the garlic to coddling the egg involved precision and attention to detail," he says. "Taking the time to reflect back on celebrations or moments that left a lasting impression on us can be the first step to putting together a memorable occasion."

Suddenly a classic salad isn't merely a random menu item, it's a conversation starter during the evening.

"I still use my grandmother's crust recipe for pies and tarts," he adds, passing a visitor a wedge of a fresh-baked plum tart. "Everyone has a recipe or food memory that can be incorporated into holiday party planning."

McFadden says it's easy to get caught up in hot food and theme trends and to miss the point of the gathering: "The art of entertaining is about being a gracious host and being present at your own party. With a

professional caterer or well-thought out plan, you can accomplish that without breaking the bank."

Traditions can change and customs evolve, but attention to the details and listening to clients' ideas never go out of style, adds McFadden.

FROM CHEF TO CATERER

In the Central Florida culinary community McFadden is known as a nice guy who's youthful appearance belies his experience. More than 20 years ago, he was one of the first local chefs to cook at the James Beard House in New York City. McFadden, then the sous chef at Downtown Disney's Fireworks Factory, and other members of the so-called Swamp Cabbage Country Club headed to the Greenwich Village landmark to tout Florida agriculture. McFadden returned to the Beard House in 2010 to cook with a new generation of young guns including Central Florida chefs James and Julie Petrakis (Ravenous Pig), Kevin Fonzo (K Restaurant & Wine Bar) and Scott Copeland (then at Antonio's La Fiamma).

Before opening, McFadden owned the acclaimed Mimi's Café & Wine Bar in Longwood, led the kitchen at Orlando's Beragamo's and worked as a part-time chef instructor at the Disney Institute. In 1998, he founded Cuisiniers, a full-service catering company with a Chef's Table called BarJMe. In addition he is the caterer of record for the East End Market in Orlando's Audubon Park Garden District.

Today he describes Cuisiniers as his "restaurant without walls."

Yes, Jamie McFadden's life is a full-time party, but it's your party. **S**

HOW TO HIRE A CATERER

So you are having your first big holiday shindig. The invitations are ready, and you've hired a battalion of strangers to impress your friends and have the run of your house. Not so comforting when you think of it that way, is it?

If you've hired help through a professional service or experienced company, relax and enjoy the party. If you hired some folks that your next door neighbor Harold heard about from his third cousin Cathy Jean, you may want to rethink this part of the party. Just like in a restaurant, service can make or break a meal.

You can hire a caterer to do as much or as little as you wish. Just remember that it is your party. A good caterer or party planner will assist and coordinate — not take over your event.

Here are some tips:

Talk to your friends and co-workers who have hired caterers for referrals. Check all references.

Set a budget early. Some catering services provide decorations, linens, tables and chairs, while others provide food only. You also need to be clear with all menu selections and portion sizes, and ask if the caterer is willing to be flexible.

Develop a menu. Sample taste tests are a good way to make sure you get what you want.