

Jefferson County chef knows recipe for senior living

BY RYAN PARKER
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Fresh seafood and vegetables are not the only aspect of the MorningStar assisted living community restaurant residents enjoy — it also has an executive chef who keeps the menu interesting.

Michael DeGiovanni, who is a certified executive chef through the American Culinary Federation, cooks and oversees the menu for the Lakewood MorningStar location.

The Wheat Ridge resident said cooking is his passion.

"This kitchen is run just like a restaurant, and everything we have is scratch cooking, including all the baked goods," DeGiovanni said.

The assisted living community at 2800 Youngfield St. opened its doors in July and the first location in Littleton was introduced three years ago.

DeGiovanni said assisted living has come a long way, and although it may once have been a topic many seniors would prefer to avoid, it's now more enjoyable.

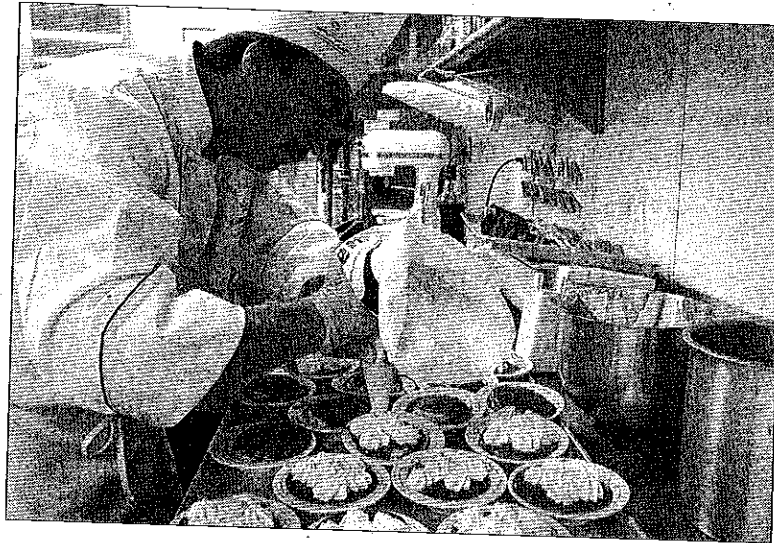


Photo by JUSTIN SAGARSEE

Michael DeGiovanni, executive chef at Morning Star Assisted Living, plates strawberry shortcake for dessert Wednesday, Sept. 10.

"The restaurant here is a part of those good feelings, and we want residents to be happy and eat well, really well," he said.

The center can accommodate 65 residents in the assisted living area and more than 40 in the two memory care facilities.

"There is a huge demand for

memory care these days with Alzheimer's and dementia," he said.

The menu from the community is a seasonal one, which changes every six weeks, he said. "It's important that when you eat at the same place all day, everyday, there needs to be a lot of options. I don't care if we are talking about

The Ritz, people will get sick of the same thing," DeGiovanni said.

According to Adam Nolan of the American Culinary Federation, DeGiovanni's training that led to his certification was quite extensive.

"The ACF operates the only comprehensive certification program for chefs in the United States and currently certifies nearly 9,000 professionals worldwide," Nolan said. "Candidates for ACF certification must have a high level of work and educational experience, and pass both a written and practical examination. In addition, candidates must complete coursework in food safety, nutrition and supervisory management."

Now DeGiovanni oversees three other chefs and a few dishwashers and has forums once a month with residents to discuss dishes and outline what they would like to have on the menu.

"I am very open to what they like, and I ask them to bring in any old family recipes that they would like us to try out," he said.

The community does have

some patients who are diabetics or have food allergies.

"This is just like a real restaurant with options on the menu, and they can add or leave off anything from the plate," he said.

DeGiovanni has been a chef since the early 1990s, and said of all his dishes, baked goods and pastries are his favorites — and the favorites of many residents too.

"They love their sweets here," he said.

He added that his fresh baked, hot bread and pecan pie are among the most popular items.

"His passion for cooking comes through for the seniors," said Katie Yoho, director of marketing for MorningStar.

According to Yoho the cooking and restaurant is the most highly rated service the community has to offer. "We have guests join residents for meals everyday. It's a popular spot for lunch."

The community has immediate move-in opportunities available. For information, call 303-233-4343.