



## Evergreen Realty Associates

235 Worcester Road

PO Box 1137

Sterling, MA 01564

Tel: 978-422-8181

Fax: 978-422-8383

[www.EvergreenRealty.com](http://www.EvergreenRealty.com)

## Senior Real Estate Matters

## Monthly Newsletter – April 2011

### Roving Chefs Deliver Seniors' Daily Bread

*By Elyse Umlauf-Garneau*

Most personal chefs can turn out gourmet fare, like Chilean sea bass and roasted pheasant or lemongrass shrimp pate, but the bread and butter of many such chef's repertoires are daily meals--stews, soups and meatloaf--for clients who can't or don't want to cook.

Increasingly, that clientele includes seniors. Daily food preparation is often the one aging-in-place stumbling block that seniors and their families can't leap, and hiring a personal chef often removes that roadblock.

Personal chefs Carol Wood of the Occasional Chef, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., and Brenda Huard of Dinners Done, in Calgary, Alberta, both have elderly clients who simply can't cook for themselves and would be in assisted living without their services.

#### Better than take-out

Huard is often contacted by seniors' time-starved children, who are at wit's end trying to shop and cook daily meals for elderly parents and simultaneously tend to their own children and jobs.

In addition, many have found that other meal delivery strategies have failed, according to Huard. Some seniors end up not eating much at all, or they rely on salty, unhealthy boxed food or on pricey, calorie-laden take-out.

Still others are managing parents' care from afar. Michele Figueroa calls the personal chef she hired for her dad, living in Florida, a godsend. A couple years ago, he'd been hospitalized with a serious illness and returned home with a restricted diet in hand. Cooking for himself was impossible and Figueroa couldn't do it because she lives in Illinois.

The service works like this. The chef visits a client's kitchen on a regular basis--sometimes weekly, sometimes every couple weeks--and cooks a series of meals that seniors or their caretakers can warm up.

Huard, for instance, has a client for whom she cooks 20 meals at a time and then he's set for nearly a month.

The chefs also do all the shopping and prep work in clients' houses, and bring their own pots, appliances, and utensils. They also clean up.

#### Serving special needs

Before starting the relationship, chefs sit with clients to assess their likes and dislikes and dietary restrictions. Often doctors have told clients to swear off fat, salt, and so forth, and chefs develop menus based on those restrictions. Figueroa says her dad's diet was extremely specialized and entailed detailed measurements of certain ingredients and the elimination of others. "The chef was able to tailor the diet to my dad's needs. For me, it was great to know that he was eating the right food," she comments.

They're also able to accommodate special requests, such as vegetarian, vegan, and Kosher diets, and they'll work clients' favorite family recipes into the meal rotation.

Pricing for personal chefs varies, depending on the location and level of service. Some, like Wood, will do extra shopping and pick up kitty litter, cleaning supplies, and so forth, for an extra fee.

And if someone wants gourmet fare, such as fancy cheese or lobster tails, costs tick up because such raw ingredients are pricier than routine staples.

But many regard the costs as small, especially when they compare it to having to move to an assisted living or nursing facility. "I have a client whose father is in assisted living, and he pays \$4,400 per month,"

comments Huard. Huard's price for 20 meals is \$350. Sure, that \$4,400 tab includes numerous other services, but chefs would argue, "Why choose a costly institutional option, if a senior really only needs assistance with meals?"

"It's not inexpensive," acknowledges Figueroa. But without the service, she says her dad could have ended up back in the hospital.

## Short-term solutions

Such chefs also do special events for seniors. That could include setting the table and cooking a lunch for seniors' friends or preparing a full Thanksgiving dinner so that a senior can host a holiday. "It allows them to continue having a social life," Wood comments, who has one client she helps every Thanksgiving. "She can still have company and enjoy her beautiful china," she adds.

Sometimes, relationships with personal chefs are temporary. Chefs can step in during an emergency and cook for a few weeks or months for those in physical therapy or for people recovering from a medical event.

## Broader safety net

There are subtle benefits too. Seniors look forward to chefs' visits and enjoy the social interaction. One of Wood's clients, for instance, likes to watch the preparation and to chit-chat with Wood. And often Wood prepares an extra treat or brings the lady's favorite tea and shares a cup with her.

Such chefs also serve as something of a safety net, offering an extra set of eyes and ears to identify emergencies and any troubles that emerge with clients.

Just recall the February news story involving a Memphis, Tenn., pizza delivery person who saved an elderly woman's life. The Domino's employee called the police when she noticed that the client had veered from her normal ordering habits. It turns out that the woman had fallen and wasn't able to call for help.

That personal connection is one reason Huard says it's important for the chef and senior to meet and to relate to one another.

Beyond liking the chef and his or her food, there are several other considerations, including:

-Background and training-- Ask chefs about their culinary experience and whether they belong to a professional chef organization.

-Food safety--Has the person been trained and certified in proper food handling?

-Insurance--Is the chef insured?

-Due diligence--Given that a chef will be coming in and out of the house, it's wise to check references and do the same level of background checks you would do on other service providers.

## Chef Finding

A number of organizations provide training and certifications to chefs, and they also offer ways to locate chefs and research their specialties. For more information, see:

- American Personal & Private Chef Association (<http://personalchef.com/index.php>)  
The [www.personalchefsearch.com](http://www.personalchefsearch.com) lists chefs in the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere.
- Canadian Personal Chef Association, [www.cook4me.ca](http://www.cook4me.ca)

[www.Hireachef.com](http://www.Hireachef.com) -The site is associated with the United States Personal Chef Association ([www.USPCA.com](http://www.USPCA.com)).

**Real Estate Matters: News & Issues for the Mature Market**  
**Evergreen Realty Associates**  
**235 Worcester Road**  
**PO Box 1137**  
**Sterling, MA 01564**  
**Judy Reynolds, CRB, CRS, e-Pro**

