

May 7, 2014

Chefs share their moms' best tips

Mother's Day is near, so we asked local pros.

By Susan Dalzell
Contributing Writer

In honor of Mother's Day on May 11, we checked in with area chefs to ask them one vital question: "What's the best cooking advice your mother ever gave you?"

For many, the question elicited fond childhood memories of cooking at the elbow of mom or grandma, learning family recipes. Mothers who loved to cook raised kids who went on to love to cook.

Of course, mothers who didn't love to cook also had their influence. As one chef — who asked to remain nameless — told us: "My mother burns

water." So perhaps he learned to cook out of a sense of survival?

Chef Doug McGregor co-owns Seasons Bistro and Grille in Springfield with his sister, Margaret Mattox. He gives his mother, Judy McGregor, a lot of credit for his career as a chef. "The best advice she ever gave me was never be afraid to try new things," he said. "She tried a lot of new things in the kitchen and was always pushing the envelope with us as kids, always putting things on the table most kids wouldn't eat."

Her desire to experiment rubbed off on her son. "There's so much out there I have to try out," he said. "I'm always working to find

Chefs continued on D8



Dayton Racquet Club Chef Jack Skilliter says his mom, Marty Skilliter always included him when she cooked and baked when he was growing up. "That's how I got my start," he said. CONTRIBUTED

Chefs

continued from D1

something new for my menu, and that's thanks to mom."

Chef William Pence of Carvers Steak and Chops in the south suburbs of Dayton appreciated the care his mother, Frederica, always put into preparing food. "I come from a big family, and we were always getting together for meals when I was growing up," he said. "She taught me something that she learned from her father and that was to always cook with love. It's something that I've used throughout my career."

Branden Rolfe, head chef at Bullwinkle's Top Hat Bistro in Miamisburg, shared similar advice from his mother, who loves to cook. "She always said to cook with your heart and put your soul into it," he said. His mother also imparted more practical advice for the cooking process: "Taste it periodically."

For Aaron Fields, executive chef at Buckhorn Tavern in Dayton (north of town), cooking became a family affair. His mother, Deborah Fields, was a professional chef, as well, and they worked side by side for eight years. "She taught me to use quality products to start," he said. "You don't skimp on ingredients."

Chef Darin Mitchell of Coco's Bistro in Dayton said his mother, Helen, also demonstrated healthy cooking hab-

its. "She would say to use the best, freshest ingredients," he said. "We always had a garden, and she'd serve us fresh green beans and corn and berries. She took very good care of us."

Matt Klum, executive chef at Jay's Seafood in Dayton, said his mother valued good ingredients, as well. But that was just the start. "What was really important to her was for us to be a family together at the dinner table. Shutting the TV off and sitting down together and talking and really being together as a family," Klum said.

Last but not least, the sweetest advice came from the mother of Linda Lane, a line cook at Harrison's Restaurant in Tipp City. "My mom's best advice was to put a dab of sugar in everything," Lane said. Elise Lane enjoyed baking, but the sugar rule was broadly applied. "Even with her vegetables, she put a dab of sugar in it."

Tips for cooking for mom on Mother's Day

Think you'd like to treat mom to a home-cooked meal on Mother's Day? Jack Skilliter, a local chef, provided us with a few pointers. (Skilliter is leaving his role as the executive chef at the Dayton Racquet Club since he recently announced that he is opening a restaurant in Dayton's Oregon Historic District.)

It should be a given that Mom should not cook. I like to cook "with" Mom, enjoying her company as I cook, but

having everything prepared enough so she can leisurely enjoy a glass of iced tea or wine while the meal is being cooked.

Cook something that you've made before. The best way to cook a delicious meal is practice.

If you cook something new, cook something that is easy and approachable for everyone. The biggest mistakes I have made when cooking for family have been cooking something I have never done before and not giving myself enough time to prepare everything properly. It's always easier to hide or disregard mistakes when a meal is on time or early, as opposed to a meal that is an hour late with an unruly, hungry crowd.

Prep your mind. Finding a good recipe is a great first step, but recipes are only as good as your understanding of them. Because of that, I always read recipes two or three times before using them, and then try to recall the steps in my head and list the ingredients and utensils I will need before I start to prepare anything. Through focused study of a recipe for five to 10 minutes, you can save yourself more time than you've invested by avoiding bumbling around between steps to gather additional items you may have forgotten or overlooked.

Contact this contributing writer at susan.dalzell@gmail.com.