

By Rick Weinberg

Magnifico!



In honor of her mother and grandmother, chef Claudine Maltese created a specialty personal catering service in Southern California in the tradition of family and love.

When Claudine Maltese caters a party or an event, it's in the spirit of family, and it winds up becoming an unforgettable experience for everyone who attends.

Whether it's a 40th birthday party for 50 people, a business lunch for 20 professionals or a 5th birthday party for 25 rowdy kids, everyone walks away craving more and saying, "That's the best food I've ever had."

They walk away fulfilled and with a warm heart, not only from the breathtaking food, but from the presentation of the food and Claudine herself.

"Claudine has a special aura about her," says Linda De-fonce, who had her 40th birthday party catered by Maltese Cuisine, and loved it so much that she has had the company cater several other events for her.

"Claudine is an incredibly warm and sincere person who happens to be a spectacular cook," Linda says. "She puts her heart and soul into what she makes, and the presentation she creates, well, it just leaves me speechless."



Anyone who tastes any of Claudine's creations agrees. From her Parmesan risotto and chicken pesto sandwiches to veal scaloppini to her unique Italian doughnuts, Claudine blends stunning authenticity with creative flair in presentation and preparation.

Italian food may be her specialty, but she's equally adept at cooking for any theme, including Southwestern and Pacific Rim. Whatever a client wants, she obliges, whether it is family meals, personal chef services, corporate boxed lunches (They're unreal," says business client Dylan Duong) and pizza kits.



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She even offers cooking classes.

Her culinary skills and business savvy are in such high demand that even Hollywood craves her cuisine. Claudine prepares food for the cast and crew of many top-rated TV shows and feature films, including former hits *Everybody Loves Raymond*, *The Bernie Mac Show*, *ER*, *Will & Grace* and the *Garfield* movie.

"Her sausage and pepper subs are out of this world," says Brad Garrett, who played the lovable Robert on *Everybody Loves Raymond*.

And not only is the food and presentation magnificent, so is the unparalleled professionalism of Claudine and her experienced, courteous staff.

"Claudine is incredibly organized and very detailed oriented," says Collette Lash, one of Maltese Cuisine's employees. "It's wonderful being a part of what she creates. Her food and presentation are art."

What completes the incredible package is the quality of the food Claudine buys and prepares. The thoroughness and conscientiousness with which she uses to construct her creations are of the highest standards.

The process for making many of her authentic Italian dishes can take hours, even days. Claudine's signature marinara sauce is a prime example. Instead of just throwing a few jars of sauce into a pot and calling it hers, Claudine starts off at the market early in the



morning, buying only the freshest basil, garlic, oregano and tomatoes. Then it's into the kitchen for five to seven hours of prepping, browning, melding and stirring. In many cases, the sauce simmers overnight, allowing for all of the ingredients to truly blend together.

"It's not the easiest thing, but the sauce is definitely the most rewarding," Claudine says. "My mom always said, 'A cook is only as good as their sauce.'"

Claudine even goes the extra mile by flying special products in from the East Coast at no extra charge to her clients—just to make sure she gives her guests the absolute best.

"I buy nothing but the highest quality food," she says. "It's not what's on sale. It's 'what is the freshest food available.' Everything I use is totally fresh, bought at the market the day of or the day before the event."

After Claudine caters an event, it's common for guests in attendance to book an event with Maltese Cuisine right on the spot. That's perhaps the greatest compliment a caterer can receive.

But Claudine always downplays her talents. She's extremely humble, saying, "It's not about me. It's about family, friends and the closeness they share. It's about bringing them together to enjoy wonderful food. This brings joy to me. I love cooking and seeing people enjoy themselves."

Whenever Claudine is cooking one of her delicious Italian specialties like manicotti or tiramisu, it's as if her mother Rosemarie is always there next to her. No matter what Claudine is doing, whether it's stirring a

huge pot of tomato sauce or rolling homemade pasta, her mind flashes back to the days when she was a little girl in Basking Ridge, New Jersey watching and helping her mother cook one of her many Italian specialties.

"My fondest memories are being with my mother in the kitchen," says Claudine, who started her catering business not only as a tribute to her mother and her family, but also to follow her passion for cooking.

Claudine is married and has a baby girl of her own — and "hopefully she will enjoy being in the kitchen with me as much as I did my mother," she says.

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Even though Claudine has extensive business knowledge in management, sales, marketing and people skills, "it always comes back to cooking," she says. "Being in the kitchen is therapeutic for me. It soothes me. Cooking is what I do. Because of my upbringing, it's engrained in my heart and in my mind."

From the time she was 12 years old, Claudine would often cook for her three older brothers Tony, Dino and Craig. On many occasions, her brothers would invite close to a dozen people over just to experience their sister's cooking. Thanks to her Italian upbringing, the support of her family and friends — and most importantly her uncanny skills as a chef and caterer — Claudine has emerged into one of the most sought after caterers in Southern California.

"From the reactions we've seen, it was a no-brainer to encourage Claudine to offer her food to the public," Craig says. "Her cooking is too good to pass up."

Maltese Cuisine

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