



Brook and Tom learn the art of soup at Spoons. The children were part of Chefs on the Go, founded by Christina Marie. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTINA MARIE

Little chefs inspire teacher

Marie giving children a chance in the kitchen

By Pat Ferrier
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Question: How did Chefs on the Go get started?

Answer: Children have always been an inspiration to me, simply watching their love for life or waiting for the next excuse to laugh.

The opportunity to bring joy to kids is very rewarding to me. As a child, some of my favorite memories are putting on my apron and playing with a piece of cookie dough or having a contest with my older brother to see who could throw the pizza dough in the air the highest. While pursuing my education, I've recognized the importance of supporting the local community and have become aware of the great talent of our chefs here. The idea of exposing children to these chefs and allowing them to be able to learn from them was exciting to me. With this concept in mind, along with my childhood memories, I wanted to create a program to allow the children's inner chef to come alive after experiencing firsthand how easy happiness comes along with cooking.

Q: What is your background in food? What is your background with children?

A: My entire life, I've always appreciated great food. Having the opportunity to travel throughout Europe and experience Italian and French cuisine only enhanced my love for food, especially deserts!

Smelling fresh baked goods at a little French bakery in the morning or biting into a mouth-watering piece of pizza made by a jolly Italian was always heavenly to me! My appreciation for food has only grown stronger, and my desire to continue experimenting with cooking is endless. I've always found a way to stay connected to children either through babysitting, directing an after school program, or teaching children various sports.

Q: What kind of reception did you get initially from restaura-



Children enrolled in Chefs on the Go make the city's longest noodle at Bisetti's in Fort Collins. Chefs on the Go was the brainchild of Christina Marie, rear right. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHRISTINA MARIE

nts and chefs when you approached them about teaching kids how to cook?

A: I'm amazed at how receptive the local restaurant owners have been toward the idea of teaching children how to cook. They seem to be delighted to have the opportunity to teach their specialty. It has been an absolute joy to see the children light up as they learn from the local chefs. Today, I talked to the best French chef in town, Claude, from Restaurant Francais, and he said that the program has brought him so much enjoyment to see the kids happy and know that he contributed to that happiness.

Q: What kind of prep work do you do with the children to get them ready to go into a kitchen?

A: When the children first arrive, they select their favorite chef's hat and apron. Each session, I make the children their own special Chefs on the Go apron and color them to make it more fun for the kids. They can pick from a variety of colors, including magic mint, blizzard blue, sunshine yellow or passion pink. They then wash their hands, form a line and we proceed to follow the chef into the kitchen to start our cooking adventure.

Q: What age groups do you

target for your sessions?

A: 5-12 years old.

Q: How much do your sessions cost, how long are they, and how many do you offer each summer/year?

A: Currently, I am offering four remaining programs scheduled for this summer (Session 2: June 11-20; Session 3: June 25-July 4; Session 4: July 9-18, and Session 5: July 23-Aug. 1). Each program includes eight cooking experiences. We meet at a different restaurant each day for an hour. The program cost is \$120 per student including an apron. We will also be offering a mini one week session June 4-8 for \$90

Q: What do you enjoy the most about working with kids and food?

A: This program is based on experiential learning so it is very rewarding to see the students learn from the chefs through a hands-on approach. I've also loved watching their facial expressions as they discover their new hidden talent.

Q: After you finish your doctorate, what do you hope to do with your career?

A: I enjoy engaging students of all ages, so I'm looking for opportunities to continue growing Chefs on the Go and hopefully teach culinary tourism at Colora-

Q&A

» **Name:** Christina Marie, Chefs on the Go

» **Age:** 25

» **Family:** Mother, Sherri; and brother, Chris

» **Background:** Bachelor of science in natural resource recreation and tourism; master of management practice; and a doctoral candidate in natural resource with an emphasis in culinary tourism

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do State University.

Q: What has been the biggest surprise/challenge of running your own business?

A: The children I work with are a dynamic group and I'm constantly trying to optimize their experience to ensure I'm providing a program that's valuable, educational and enjoyable for the chefs and the children. The biggest surprise I've encountered with this business is the talent of the amazing chefs in Fort Collins and the creations they have taught the children! The kids will never forget making an alligator shaped delectable at Restaurant Francais, learning how to decorate cupcakes at Starry Night Café, having the opportunity to play Barista for the day at Beans Tree Drive Thru, being able to make the town's longest noodle at Bisetti's, making mouth watering tiramisu at Enzo's, learning how to create the best cinnamon roll in town at Silver Grill, discovering the art of fondue at Ingredient, sampling delicious frozen yogurt and making smoothies at Maiberly, embracing the Greek cuisine at Café Athens, baking delicious chocolate chip cookies at Café Ardour, making little honey bunnies at Great Harvest Bread Company, and creating a delicious key lime pie at Chocolate Café.