

contents #02

Wine and Dessert Pairings 06
Michelle Williams pairs wine and desserts for a sweet ending to gatherings any time of the year.

Basil & Salt's Pair & Pour 13
Find the perfect companion for your cheeseboard

Essence of Entertaining by Becci 22
Becci shows us how to carry entertaining in to January with ease.

Charcuterie! 24
A quick and simple guide to a holiday essential.

Success Secrets, Chef Spotlight
World renowned Chef Duane Keller takes a few minutes and talks with Megan Hill.

26



54

Whiskey Cocktails
Cocktail Whisperer Warren Bobrow takes us back in time with The Old-Fashioned Cocktail. A blend of memories, flavors and aromatics.



Beer & Holiday Foods
The Happy Hour Guys, Mark and Jimmy guide us through holiday menu and beer pairings.

32

"My approach to leadership is that I will do anything and everything for my staff to make sure they have the tools to succeed."

CHEF'S SPOTLIGHT

SUCCESS SECRETS



MEET THE CHEF WHO THRIVES ON SYNERGY

CHEF DUANE KELLER DISCUSSES THE POTENCY OF MENTORSHIP AND TEAMWORK

BY MEGAN HILL | PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED BY CHEF KELLER

Ask Duane Keller about his cooking career, and you're likely to get a story that involves hockey.

The 40-year industry veteran has just started a new position as executive chef at Belle Haven Country Club in Alexandria, Virginia. Though he's worked in restaurants since he was 13 years old, Keller says his approach to food and leading teams in restaurants is heavily influenced by his personal and family history with hockey.



Chef Duane Keller

Keller's father, Ralph, played 13 seasons in the American Hockey League and was inducted into the AHL Hall of Fame in 2016. Keller grew up playing hockey, and says he considers himself a "player-coach" in the kitchen – a member of the team who also holds a leadership position.

"I always try to put people in the right places to go out and win every game," Keller says. "You don't win every game, but everyone goes out and tries hard. My approach to leadership is that I will do anything and everything for my staff to make sure they have the tools to succeed."

Keller brings that approach to his new position at the high-end country club. Since taking the job in June, the Saskatchewan native has worked long hours reinventing the menus, throwing a huge Independence Day party for 1,400 members, filling a slew of open positions, and changing the way the kitchen is run.

"As they say, you only get one chance for a first impression," Keller says.

One of his first steps was to revive the club's one-acre farm and apiary, which is home to six beehives. "My whole philosophy on providing a culinary experience to my guests is less is more," Keller says. "Under promise, over deliver, local, sustainable. A lot of places I find the food from are within 50 to 100



KELLAR WAS THE RECIPIENT IN 2001 OF THE JAMES BEARD FOUNDATION CERTIFICATE, NAMED TO THE FLORIDA TOP 100, RECEIVED THE CCA CHEF OF THE YEAR AWARD, AND MANY MORE. AND IN ONE OF HIS BEST-KNOWN HONORS, IN 2002 HE HELPED PREPARE JULIA CHILD'S 90TH BIRTHDAY DINNER. HIS WORK THROUGHOUT METRO WASHINGTON, D.C., HAS EARNED HIM SPOTS ON THE "TOP 100" AND "BEST BRUNCHES" IN WASHINGTON MAGAZINE.

He also re-started the kitchen's pastry program, and hired staff from all over the country "I had people get on Greyhound buses from Vegas, Miami, Chicago, California, to fill 14 open positions," Keller says.

And then he got to work cleaning. In June and July, the club's busiest months of the year other than December, Keller and his team put in an additional 500 hours of cleaning. He implemented standard operating procedures, and worked to make the cooks more efficient. Keller now leads a finely-tuned machine of 35 people in the kitchen, and 50 servers and front-of-house staff.

"It took a month for people to realize that it was a new day. I kept saying the future starts today, and everybody that was out front, including the membership, all the administrative staff, all the GM, the assistant to the GM, the assistant general manager, the food and beverage director, everybody, if you ask them their jaw would just drop," Keller says. "The change was so dramatic, and when I walk through the place, it was just people had been left alone for way too long. I run a classroom environment, so I get people engaged and I got them up and going. They're all smiling and having a good time now."

Keller prides himself on the kitchen's commitment to from-scratch cooking. All of the bread is baked in-house, stocks and

soups are made completely from scratch, and desserts are all handmade, daily. In smaller restaurants, that would be a feat. In an enormous operation that serves banquets of 1,500 people on a regular basis, the from-scratch approach is nothing short of miraculous.

Keller brings an impressive resume to the new job. He was the recipient in 2001 of the James Beard Foundation Certificate, named to the Florida Top 100, received the CCA Chef of the Year Award, and many more. And in one of his best-known honors, in 2002 he helped prepare Julia Child's 90th birthday dinner. His work throughout metro Washington, D.C., has earned him spots on the "Top 100" and "Best Brunches" in Washington Magazine.



But those accolades don't go to his head. One of Keller's passions in the kitchen is mentoring up-and-coming chefs, who often go on to head restaurants of their own some day. His approach is to give feedback "ten times an hour with a 70 percent praise ratio, meaning I'm always finding somebody doing something right."

That mentoring approach builds morale and resumes at the same time. "Every sous chef I've ever had in, say, the last 15 years here in town is a head chef now," Keller says. "I guarantee they'll be a chef if they just work with me and give it their all. It takes time, but they'll be ready."

Keller has always been committed to seasonal ingredients, and tapping the local bounty as much as he can. In addition to breathing new life into the club's garden, he's also signing on new purveyors to bring the locavore approach to the table. Local farm produce features heavily, and Keller plans to start new relationships with farms to incorporate products local goat cheese. He plans to change the menu three or four times a year.

"That's the reason I live here in the mid-Atlantic," Keller says. "There are four distinct seasons."

For Keller, all of this hard work is rewarded simply by the knowledge that he's making his diners happy. And so far, he's constantly fielding requests from diners who want to talk to the man in the kitchen.

"People say if you work in a club you don't really get any notoriety or anything, but you know, what's the best compliment is just your guest, your members complimenting you. You don't need a write up in the paper or anything," Keller says. "I'm not really a country club chef, but I always say we're only as good as the last meal that we put out, so no matter where I am, I say the same thing." 

