

# The secrets of Georgina's kitchen

Georgina Burns' cooking school changes the way students look at food



By Lindsey Rivait  
Photos By Mark Olejniczak

Cooking easy, delicious, and nutritious meals is not as difficult as it seems thanks to Georgina Burns Cooking School.

In just six weeks, Burns provides her students with the skills and confidence to go into their kitchens and produce a variety of nutritious foods.

The classes feature guest speakers, including Izabela Bemben from Alexander Estate Winery who will talk to the class about pairing wine with food, and dietician Laurie Matheson who will talk about nutrition. Safety concerns are also addressed in class, including cleanliness and the usage of thermometers. The classes are held at the Freed-Orman Conference Centre, located at 400 Huron Church Road,

Williams Food Service Equipment sponsors the classes, supplying aprons, knives, and various other items to help aspiring cooks. Burns brings students to the store to help pick out proper kitchen equipment.

"We teach them how to use a food processor and a mixer and how to make them more efficient in their own kitchen," said Georgina

Burns, who also runs her own catering business, Catering By Georgina Burns.

Burns, whose family owned the Sunnyside Tavern in LaSalle, grew up in the restaurant business. Subsequently, she has 35 years of experience in the food business.

"When my children left home, it was just the two of us. The restaurant business is seven days a week. I wanted to change and work more on projects, so I started to cater," explained Burns.

After starting her company in 1997, Burns became a personal chef, but found there wasn't enough of a market for it in the area. "I was supplementing my business with doing catering, and then the catering took off," said Burns.

When she started working at the Freed-Orman Centre three years ago, she asked if she could teach cooking classes and has graduated over 50 people since.

One graduate, Heather Menzies, is now Burns' assistant. "She mostly takes care of the dishes and the backend of it. She lines up the ingredients so things are ready and we can move quickly,"

explained Burns.

While the ingredients are laid out for them, students still get hands on experience measuring and performing the rest of the cooking. Classes typically have eight to 12 students who work in small groups of three to four people.

"And if they make a mistake, it's a good thing because then they understand why it didn't work," said Burns.

#### NO PREQUISITES

Skill level does not matter when it comes to the students. Those taking Burns' classes come from all walks of life—students, doctors, and retired business people, among many others.

"They don't have to have any skill level at all. Some people come and they're using scissors to cut bacon. We teach everything, from how to use knives properly to how to purchase equipment," said Burns.

One of Burns' former students, Chris Gallant, had his wife enroll him in the class.

"I'm an amateur cook. She thought it would be a good course for me," Gallant said. "My wife doesn't cook, so I do all the cooking. I think my skill level is pretty good."

#### COOKING SCHOOL

"One of my goals is to open a restaurant one of these days, but I didn't have the basics," Gallant admits. "Now, my in-laws come over to the house a lot because I'm cooking. Every week I'd have something new to try on them."

Mary Edna Hunter took the class with her daughter who had just had a baby. "What I was looking for were shortcuts. We like to entertain, and I'm finding that doing dinner for thirty-five people is not a big chore anymore. With Georgina, I learned the shortcuts I needed to do a dinner for thirty-five people and still enjoy it. She teaches what you can do ahead of time and how to reheat it so it's not all dried out and hard," explained Hunter.

Burns simplifies difficult dishes, making them seem less intimidating and more enjoyable. "Fancy food doesn't necessarily have to be hours and hours of work. She taught the shortcuts and the practical suggestions," said Hunter.

The textbook Burns uses in class, *Cooking At Home with The Culinary Institute of America: Essential Techniques and Recipes for Creating Great Food*, is an approachable guide to cooking that gives an overview of the basic information on equipment, ingredients, and techniques. The text also features easy to follow step-by-step instructions along with corresponding photographs. The price of the textbook, a \$60 value, is included in the cost for the course. The majority of the recipes used in class are directly from the book.

"What makes it better is that you have the book in front of you and you have Georgina demonstrating it. It makes a big difference," said Hunter.

Watching Burns' techniques changed the ways in which Hunter prepares her food. "Last year's Christmas dinner, at the end of the day when everyone went home, my husband said it was the most relaxed Christmas dinner we've ever had. It was all the techniques I'd picked up from Georgina's class."

Food is supplied for the class—all the students need to do is show up and participate.

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"And if we have leftovers, they take it home," said Burns.

Burns is flexible with her students' schedules as well. "If people have a conflict with their schedule and they miss a class, I always encourage them to call me. When the next class is going on, they're invited back to take it," Burns explained.

New for Georgina Burns Cooking School this year is a free four-week cooking course for brides when they book the catering for their wedding through Burns' catering business.

Rebecca Smith is one of the first students in Burns' bridal cooking class.

"She was an incredible help during the whole process of deciding what we were going to have and giving us different ideas for the wedding," said Smith. "We love to cook and entertain, and we're always trying new things. I'm just hoping to gain presentation and just learn from Georgina, because her skill level is so much higher," she continued.

As in her own catering kitchen, Burns encourages her students to experiment with cooking seasonally.

"I try to stay with things that are grown locally and that are good for us. And also, you're introducing people to many new things. I try to have that reflected in my menus and the things that I do," she said.

Knowing the history of where food comes from is important to



Georgina Burns puts final touches on a fruit tray.

Burns, so using canned or boxed foods is definitely frowned upon.

"I believe that with simple things like a bag of onions, celery, garlic, and carrots you can start any pot of soup. It's much more economical and you know where it's coming from. You know what's in it because you control the amount of fat you're cooking with," she said.

Burns teaches her students healthier approaches to adding flavour to dishes without the fat by using herbs and spices. She is concerned about the diet and health of young teenagers as well.

"If they're not fed the proper diet, they're really setting a bad pattern for their habits," said Burns. "I promote cooking for yourself. When you cook, cook a larger batch and put it in the freezer and then at least you know what it is."

"You can eat out," she said, "but I think comfort comes from the stove. Comfort comes when you prepare something really good for the one that you love," said Burns.

The next six-week session of Georgina Burns Cooking School begins Jan. 13 and costs \$377. Classes are held Tuesdays from 6-9 p.m. In the first class, students will learn how to take care of their salad greens, debone chicken, and make chicken breast fillets with fine herbs sauce. To enroll in Georgina Burns Cooking School call (519) 734-8187 or visit: <http://www.georginaburns.ca>.



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