

Local caterer's creations a hit with White Sox fans



On Occasion Catering owner Kathy Pedersen displays her pies, including the Manor House Cherry and the Pecan Pie with White Sox Drizzle, favorites at U.S. Cellular Field.

By Kim Mikus | [Daily Herald Columnist](#)

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Opening day for Kathy Pedersen's catering company and new cafe coincided with the Chicago White Sox home opener.

Pedersen knows this fact because her pies were served at U.S. Cellular Field. One of Pedersen's newest accounts involves baking pies for the upscale Stadium Club at the Chicago ballpark. The pecan pie with White Sox drizzle, consisting of white and dark chocolate, is a hit.

Growing up on Chicago's North Side, she jokes that it's a little odd to have a Sox schedule hanging in her office.

But switching loyalty is part of the deal when you make it to the big leagues. And that's where Pedersen is headed with some of her high-profile accounts.

The owner of On Occasion Catering & Events was chosen as a sponsor for the recent Chicago Auto Show where she served Fico Del Cielo and her specialty Kingston pecan bars laced with Jamaican rum. Serving desserts to 2,000 people at the show gave her instant exposure.

One woman developed an addiction to her pecan bars and recently drove 75 miles each way to purchase the sweet treat.

Pedersen, who started a gourmet boutique catering business three and a half years ago, recently took it to the next level.

In the past, Pedersen has utilized commercial kitchens in the area to prepare for her catering events. She recently found a former bakery in Palatine to call her own.

Because the kitchen is in a commercial area, she decided to open a quaint cafe in the front of her storefront at 1276 E. Dundee Road in the Woodcraft Plaza near Rand Road.

The café, decorated in olive green and purples, offers the same upscale lunch that's on her corporate lunch menu. A popular pick is the Turkey and Smokehouse Bacon sandwich with oven roasted turkey breast, crispy bacon, greens and cranberry mascarpone spread on multi-grain bread. Served with a side and dessert, it sells for \$12.95. Other highlights include the chopped salad and the albacore tuna salad sandwich served on petite croissants.

Pedersen focuses on presentation and using high end ingredients. "I make everything from scratch, which is rare these days," she said. The chef has spent a long time perfecting her recipes.

The other aspect that sets On Occasion apart is the heavy focus on presentation at events. "We try to set it up and make it gorgeous," she said.

Venues include everything from weddings around the city and suburbs to romantic dinners for two. Pedersen has been growing the corporate lunch aspect of the business.

Training staff to ensure things are done perfectly is important to the owner, who admits she's having a difficult time delegating as her business grows. She pulls from a staff of about 50 people serving as independent contractors.

Pederson's fascination with the kitchen kicked off as a teenager. She recalls attending a summer camp where she couldn't stop looking at the huge kitchen. Finally, the cook asked her to come in and help instead of standing at the doorway watching.

"She was making dinner rolls on a large maple table. I learned to roll them by hand. I loved it," Pedersen said.

She was hooked.

Pedersen focused her attention on raising her three daughters and two sons, ranging in age from 16 to 28.

She home-schooled all of her children until they entered high school.

"I'm used to cooking for a crowd," Pedersen jokes.

She always baked her children's birthday cakes and then their friends' as well.

Itching to get into catering, which was her first job as a teenager, Pedersen worked for other companies before launching her own business.

Even working 16-hour days, Pedersen loves her career.

"It's quite busy. But it's a blast. It makes my day when people enjoy what I create," she said.

For more information, check out:
www.onoccasioncatering.com