

Chef's Table Series

University of Richmond

Introduction:

Richmond, Virginia, has become a celebrated "foodie town" where locally owned restaurants and chefs are regularly featured in national media. University of Richmond Dining Services is a part of this exciting metamorphosis and has built a talented team of culinarians with breadths of experience that benefit our program. The inaugural Chef's Table series was created in 2024 to highlight this talent while giving our students and guests access to elevated dishes, not on the regular menu. During lunch on the first Thursday of every month, Chef's Table events feature one of our culinarians and foods that they are passionate about.

Essay:

Chef's Table events are elevated monotony breakers, offering a small taste of fine dining in a pop-up environment.

For September's menu, Chef de Cuisine Andy Kerscher created small seafood plates of Old Bay crab arancini with smoked tomato aioli, sautéed mussels in a white wine and butter broth, and shrimp salad on buttery toasted rolls. A serious fisherman in his free time, Chef Andy's menu reflected his passion for fresh, sustainably sourced seafood and comforting, rich, buttery preparations.

In October, Executive Chef Tyler Betzhold prepared surf and turf plates of scallops with green papaya salad, pork dumplings with pickled kombu vegetables, and mango lassi cups. Chef Tyler's menu of composed plates with layered flavors revolved

around his love of international cuisines.

Retail chef manager Amanda Boyd brought her brunch favorites to the program in December with blueberry French toast, grits with bacon, gouda cheese, and onions, a cranberry orange mocktail, and charcuterie boxes, with gluten-free versions available upon request. Chef Amanda's menu blended her favorite meal with the grab-and-go retail location she manages on campus.

Each Chef's Table menu offered various colors, textures, and flavors, illustrating the background and interests of the people who prepared them.

Introduction:

At the University of Richmond's Heilman Dining Center, our all-you-care-to-eat dining hall, kitchen life is behind the scenes with much of the food preparation happening behind walls and doors. With the increased interest in food, culinary life, and the dramatization of the culinary world in cooking shows and hit series like *The Bear*, Dining Services has seen a parallel excitement around demonstration cooking and increased requests for kitchen tours. Chef's Table events occur in our center dining room, with most of the dishes prepared in front of guests.

Essay:

Chef's Table events are the definition of an elevated pop-up. A circular cooking area in the center dining room is surrounded by presentation tables with black skirting, white linens, and a small screen hiding hot boxes, paperware, and waste bins. The action takes place in the center of this circle—staff are weaving in and out as hot items are fired off on electric or propane burners, and plates are composed and placed on the outer tables of the circle for guests to enjoy! The fast-paced excitement of our kitchen is brought to life right in the middle of lunchtime.

Wearing their whites and toques, each chef took center stage for their event: Chef Tyler was at a carving station slicing roasted New York strip beef, Chef Andy sautéed mussels, and Chef Amanda battered and browned French toast. Culinary staff were the sous chefs, and front-of-house staff assisted with plating. Cooking scents added to the atmosphere and drew in guests, with crowds quickly forming to catch the show. As guests queued to participate in the tasting, they could speak directly with the featured chef, ask about preparation and inspiration, and ultimately, thank them for the experience.

Introduction:

The overarching marketing goal for the Chef's Table events is to familiarize our campus community with the talented culinary staff in Dining Services. Featured chefs are spotlighted on social media, digital flyers and posters, our website, and in campus emails known as SpiderBytes. Promotional copy for each event describes the tantalizing menus the chefs will prepare, and imagery focuses solely on professional portraits of the chefs.

In a larger context, the Chef's Table series is event marketing. It fosters engagement and brand awareness through direct interaction with our culinary staff while giving guests a fantastic dining experience.

Essay:

Marketing for the Chef's Table events is part of a more significant push to familiarize the campus community with our talented culinarians. In 2022, the marketing team arranged for annual professional portraits of all dining leadership. Portraits help identify our team at major events and on our website, which was expanded to include a staff listing and feature stories highlighting staff backgrounds and unique talents. From there, we built the event marketing concept of Chef's Table to highlight individual staff with real-time, in-person engagement.

Each Chef's Table event prominently features the highlighted chef on posters and digital flyers. A display announcing the chef and their menu is placed in the dining hall lobby on the event day. An announcement is made before the event and on event day in the campus-wide email called SpiderBytes and through TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram stories and posts.

Composed plate displays at the event are minimally and tastefully decorated to keep the focus on the food itself. Menus and menu identifiers, including dietary icons, are placed with the composed plates. Customer feedback is gathered anecdotally through an online feedback form called URHeard, Text n'Tell screens, and Instagram polls.

Introduction:

To say the Chefs Tables events are popular would be an understatement. The excitement around the events has grown so much that when space is cleared for a pop-up in the center dining room, students ask, “Is there a Chef’s Table today!?”

The excitement is also internal, with a healthy competition between chefs, which drives engagement by the kitchen staff.

“Chef’s Table has been a monotony breaker for our staff, too,” says Chef de Cuisine Andy Kerscher. “The series has been an eye opener to the vast variety of culinary experience and the wealth of knowledge of our team.”

Essay:

For the first Chef’s Table in September, our guest count was on par with the average for a Thursday lunch. As the monthly events progressed, we exceeded the average, with 70+ guests in October and 131 additional guests in December.

Due to a busy culinary calendar in November, we needed to postpone the Chef’s Table. Instead of losing momentum on such a new series, we pivoted from the original format to include non-culinary managers of our retail operations. This similar event, named Spotlight Retail, used the same pop-up event style, and highlighted our convenience store manager and their new coffee program. Guests tasted different brands of cold brew, local coffee, cakes, and breads and then completed a survey informing the final menu for the C-store coffee counter. This alternative to Chef’s Table allows for flexibility in scheduling and keeps the guests engaged the first Thursday of every month.

“Food can be about community and is a cultural and personal expression,” says Executive Chef Tyler Betzhold. “It’s been a lot of fun to see what inspires our chefs through a productive and creative outlet that can be shared with our community.”

Log in to nacufs.awardsplatform.com to see complete entry attachments.



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Chefs Table Prep... 27 KiB



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September Chef's Table: Small Seafood Plates
Chef de Cuisine Andy Kerscher

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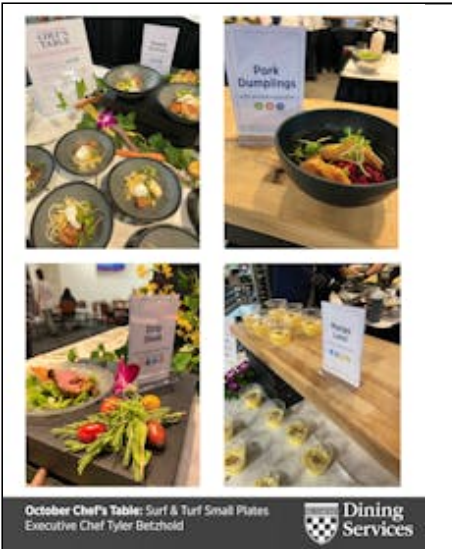
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