

Telluride is home to new cooking school

By D. Dion

Aspiring cooks can now take classes locally. The Cook's Table, Telluride's cooking school, opened its doors this summer. The program hosts renowned chefs from the region, and outside of the region, who will share their culinary expertise.

"The point is," said Jake Linzinmeir, one of the school's founders, "to take the mystery out of food, and have fun."

Linzinmeir, the chef/owner of the Excelsior Cafe, has joined forces with chef Ike Marr to create The Cook's Table. The title borrows from the term "chef's table," which is the seating in a restaurant within the kitchen.

"Restaurant guests sitting in the kitchen is becoming more popular," said Marr. "People aren't as worried about the ambience as they are about how the food is prepared, and how the restaurant is run. They are not interested in the contrived environment."

The Cook's Table offers the same type of uncontrived, intimate environment for which chef's table seating strives. The cooking school is set up in a small, provincial home on Pacific Avenue. The La Cornue oven — an item that was used both for cooking as well as to heat country homes in France, considered the premier oven in the industry — is surrounded by its various copper and cast iron companions. This cooking area opens up to the tall wooden prep table that students encircle. Here, small classes of 10-12 students will become privy to chef's secret recipes and hints, as well as being able to sample the gourmet products.

The Cook's Table's founders prefer the intimate kitchen space and small class size because it fosters an informal, comfortable atmosphere. While the cooking school explores all types of cuisine, from traditional French, to

regional American, and everything in between, Linzinmeir and Marr's kitchen has a distinct feel.

"The kitchen staff in France is called a 'brigade'," said Linzinmeir. "We have the French passion for food without the attitude. We are relaxed, and informal. The kitchen atmosphere is much more Italian."

The Cook's Table is an extension of Linzinmeir's Excelsior Cafe, whose kitchen serves fare with an Italian flair. Chefs visiting the school will not only teach classes, but will also take the Cafe's helm for an evening. Linzinmeir himself welcomes the double duty of the Cafe kitchen and The Cook's Table.

"It is nice for me to have [the school]," said Linzinmeir. "In the cafe you're in the back all day. You never get to see the smile on someone's face."

The quaint home that serves as the school's headquarters also has accommodations for guest chefs.

As Linzinmeir and Marr welcome the chefs to The Cook's Table, they are also welcoming a new trend to Telluride. Traditionally, cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Aspen have been hubs for gourmet food, elite restaurants and, consequently, upper-echelon chefs. According to Linzinmeir, Telluride attracts the same quality of chefs as other upper-crust destinations.

"Telluride is really stepping up to the plate," quipped Linzinmeir in praise of the culinary talent found in the region. "I want to showcase the local and regional chefs — we have some great chefs here."

Linzinmeir believes that Telluride's culinary reputation may attract new businesses and widen the array of talented chefs, but he also believes that kind of growth to be a positive influence.

"The more really good restaurants we have here, the better it will be for all of [the people in the

fine dining industry]," said Linzinmeir. "People will come here just because of that reputation."

The Cook's Table will begin its winter session with two classes under the instruction of Kendra Wilcox of Kendra's Kitchen Natural Foods, Incorporated.

Wilcox hits the lecture/instruction circuit

Local chef and entrepreneur Kendra Wilcox will augment her busy winter schedule, giving classes at both The Cook's Table and the Cooking School of Aspen. In Aspen, Wilcox will lecture in a slot next to chef Mark Miller, of the renowned Coyote Cafe and Red Sage restaurants.

In business since 1987, Wilcox earned her seat among the reputed chefs in the fine dining industry. Although she has had great success developing product lines (Southwest Seasoning & Rub, Crispitas, To-Hell-U-Ride BBQ Sauce, and Telluride Honey Wheat Bread Mix), her acclaim has likely come from the success attributed to her extensive, high-profile clientele.

As an event caterer, personal chef and concessionaire, Wilcox has used her natural food approach to cooking to please the palates of stars and festival goers alike. Her client list runs the gamut — from Christie Brinkley, Daryl Hannah, and Ralph Lauren, to the hordes of people at the Telluride Wine Festival, to the Telluride Ski & Golf Co., to Kodak, to the hunters in a hunting camp, to the Smithsonian Institute.

Educated at Boston University, Kendra perfected her culinary techniques through extensive travel and further schooling. She attended seminars at Cordon Bleu in France. "It's very social," said Linzinmeir of the class atmosphere. and Bedgebury Park in England. She traveled beyond



The Marr, Kendra Wilcox, and Jake Linzinmeir take a lighthearted approach to cooking. The Cook's Table offers gourmet cooking classes in an informal setting.
Photo by Noel Jones

Europe to China, South America, Mexico, and Belgium, where she studied regional cuisine. Wilcox chose Telluride as her home because it facilitates her active lifestyle.

"Up until I was 18, I rode horses and trained under Olympic trainers," said Wilcox. "I'm a sportsperson, but I didn't want to be a poor athlete. I started the company so that I could feed my horse."

Kendra has enjoyed horseback riding, skiing and trail running for her past 12 years as a resident of Telluride. In keeping with her lifestyle, Wilcox strives to provide healthy, natural food to her clients.

"Now that the organic industry can compete price-wise and taste-wise, I use organic produce whenever I can, and natural foods. Never MSG, and no preservatives in my seasoning," said Wilcox.

Wilcox's father was a physician and a cardio-pulmonary specialist.

Her experiences as a child helped shape her beliefs about healthy foods.

"I grew up eating natural, gourmet foods," said Wilcox. "I was on the playground with an organic carrot trying to swap it for a twinkie."

As an adult, Wilcox as a wilds the carrot. As a cooking instructor, she will dangle more than the carrot before the eyes of her students. Students will receive laminated recipes, as well as instruction and food.

Wilcox is also sharing her talents by writing a cookbook, with editor Christina A. McLean, called "Simply Telluride." The book will have a classic French emphasis with a southwestern twist.

People interested in Kendra's Kitchen can contact her at 728-7222, or 1-(800) 894-9086. Her e-mail address is <kendraskit@aol.com> and her website is <www.kendras-kitchen.com>.