

# Local merchant shows cooks ways to make an impression

By Kathleen Brotherton  
For the Leader

There's an old saying that bears repeating as Valentine's Day approaches: "The quickest way to a man's heart is through his stomach."

Mary Hatfield, a fairly recent transplant to the Festus area – she's been here for just about two years – not only knows how to fix special dishes that can capture someone's heart, but she helps others do the same.

As the owner and operator of Chef's Stop, located at 1170 W. Gannon Drive in Festus, Mary has been fixing family meals since her junior high days.

"When I grew up in Rolla, my mother worked, and I always got dinner ready. I've been cooking ever since. Both my mother and grandmother loved to cook and they taught me a lot. But back then we were from the era where everything was fried, so I fried chicken, pork chops and made meals around that."

Over time, she said, she incorporated healthier methods into her cooking. Many involve some of the utensils and mixes she sells in her shop.

Still, she said, she finds that family and friends request her homemade lasagna, vegetable beef soup and during holidays, her special herbed baked turkey.

"My daughters are grown and one lives in Baltimore and the other in Atlanta and when they're home, they want me to fix my old-fashioned comfort foods they grew up with. If I deviate, they let me know," Mary said with a laugh.

To save time, she finds many modern gadgets like the "Prep Express" she uses to grate cheese quickly (among other tasks).



Kathleen Brotherton photo

**Mary Hatfield decided that because her new hometown of Festus didn't have a specialty store selling kitchen items, she'd open one herself – and she did. Chef's Stop is in the Gannon Regional Shopping Center in Festus.**

"I'm not afraid to use mixes as a base for other dishes to save preparation time. Another tip I've found that helps is, if you're making a cheese ball for an appetizer, I'll line a round bowl, about the size that I want the ball to be when it's done, with plastic wrap or wax paper first, then put the cheese ball mixture in it and form it to the bowl, so all I do is lift it out and it's already shaped."

Mary reluctantly admitted with a chuckle that like other cooks, she's had a failure or two. Both of her memorable gaffes involved the same ingredient.

"I love steamed broccoli and have on two occasions let the water evaporate and ended up burning two good pans that I had to throw away. And oh – it does not smell good!"

She moved from Edwardsville, Ill., two years ago and said she missed having a local store that carried most of the same items she now carries at Chef Stop – which she stocks with high-quality products like knives and cookware, gourmet foods and pastas, designer gadgets, even Bissinger's chocolates.

"Most of all, I missed my flavored coffees and had the idea, why not open a store of my own in this area, since there seemed to be a need for one. And I did!"

Chef's Stop carries 16 flavors of coffee, teas, soups and pancake mixes, gourmet cake and cookie mixes, a variety of sea salts, famous chefs' products and cookbooks.

"Every cook should have a 'Food Lover's Companion,'" she said.

The book is a condensed encyclopedia of cooking terms. It includes a wealth of helpful information about cooking, all in one book.

"I know people in this area love to hunt, so I also sell the 'Wild Game Cookbook.'"

Every day, Mary offers her customers tempting samples of the dishes she creates from the mixes and flavored coffees or teas available in her shop.

Several times each month she invites personal chefs to give demonstrations.

"Our classes have included grilling instructions, 'A Taste of Italy,' and just in time for Valentine's Day, 'Sweets for the Sweet' will be offered at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 6."

While it sounds as if Mary has had much experience in marketing, in fact, before she opened the shop, she had little experience in the field.

She has a degree in education and taught special education classes for seven years before she returned to college to earn another degree as a legal assistant. She worked for 25 years in that field.

Mary says she and her husband, Joe, the director of purchasing for the Mississippi Lime Co., enjoy traveling. They've been abroad several times and crisscrossed the country going to baseball stadiums.

"I like to try new dishes and specialized food for different locals wherever we go, and try to guess what's in it to duplicate it at home. I've even asked the server what it contains and often I'm given the recipe."

She said she has a passion for seafood, but Joe doesn't share it, so the only time she enjoys it is when they eat out.

Her home-cooked meals, however, won Joe's heart.

### SUN-DRIED TOMATO ORZO SALAD

16-ounce bag orzo, cooked and drained

- 6 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large red onion, chopped
- 1 small eggplant, diced
- 3/4 cup Robert Rothchild Sun-Dried

#### Tomato Bread Dipper

- 2 red peppers, cut in 1/2-inch cubes
- 1/4 cup basil, chopped
- 1/4 cup Italian parsley, chopped
- Fresh cracked pepper
- 1/2 cup pine nuts, toasted
- 6 ounces feta cheese, crumbled

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil and saute onions until translucent. Add eggplant and cook until tender. Cool.

Mix Sun-Dried Tomato Bread Dipper with the remaining 4 tablespoons olive oil and gently mix into the orzo. Add cooked vegetables, peppers, basil, parsley and pepper. Toss all together, taste for seasoning and sprinkle the top with pine nuts and feta cheese.

### BLT & POTATO FRITTATA

Wind & Willow BLT cheeseball mix

- 1 1/2 cups frozen diced hash browns with green peppers and onions, thawed
- 1 1/2 cups Egg Beaters or 6 eggs
- 4 tablespoons half-and-half (you may use fat-free)
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese (regular or reduced fat, not fat-free)

Preheat medium size skillet over medium heat. Spray generously with cooking oil; cook hash browns over me-

dium heat for five minutes. Reduce heat to medium low. Mix Egg Beaters or eggs with BLT seasoning packet and half-and-half. Pour over hash browns, sprinkle with topping mix, cover and cook 10 minutes or until eggs are set. Sprinkle with cheese. Cover and cook 5 minutes or until cheese melts evenly. (Optional: Add cooked and crumbled sausage or well drained diced tomatoes to hash browns) Garnish with fresh parsley. Makes 6 servings.

### KEY LIME CRESCENT CAKE

Wind & Willow Key Lime Cheeseball Mix

- 8 ounces cream cheese
- 4 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 1 egg
- 8 ounce container refrigerated crescent roll dough
- 2 tablespoons sugar

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray 8-inch-by-8-inch pan with cooking oil.

Combine Key Lime Mix, cream cheese and butter and blend until smooth. Beat in egg until well blended.

Press one-half of crescent roll dough into bottom of prepared pan, pressing seams together. Spread cheese ball mixture evenly over dough; top with the remaining dough. Combine sugar and graham topping (from mix); sprinkle over the top. Bake 25 minutes or until golden brown and filling is set. Refrigerate until well chilled and cut into bars. May be topped with whipped topping.

Serve chilled. Makes 9 servings.