

T H E

J O B

C E N T E R

CATERING



With catered food, presentation can mean everything. Most caterers have a variety of items they are particularly adept at cooking, but they must be able to alter them to meet customers' needs.

Think weddings, balls, parties, festivities, and food, and “caterer” comes to mind. Yet while caterers often start their business because of the joy they find in cooking and watching people eat their creations, the eating experience is often just the icing on a very difficult cake for caterers.

Catering is a fast-growing and diverse industry. The expansion of the catering industry has gone from on-premise catering in hotels, restaurants, and clubs, to event planning in venues such as arenas and parks, and includes everything from traditional weddings to sporting events.

A caterer must know food, but culinary talent alone does not guarantee success. Since more than 70 percent of all catering services are owner-operated, caterers must know sound business principles. They must have the ability to manage a staff of part-time or full-time cooks and servers. They must be exceptional organizers and planners in order to judge how much food is needed, how long preparation will take, and how much equipment and personnel are required. They must be able to adapt to a variety of cooking locations, many types of people, and any whims the client may have.

It is crucial that a caterer be an expert in food cost. Understanding how to determine food cost enables a caterer to fix prices that will not discourage clients while simultaneously generating profits.

And that is just the beginning. Many caterers don't only prepare the meal, but orchestrate the entire event. They provide or arrange for decorations, flowers, china, silver, photography, linens, and entertainment. And at the end of night, they must clean it up and pack it up.

Sales and catering managers are typically employed by large hotels, convention centers, and other establishments that offer locations for meetings, receptions, or other special events. Sales and catering managers do not participate in cooking. Instead, they are the liaison between the client and the executive chef. They assist the client in choosing the best menu for their needs and budgets. Most sales and catering managers are also responsible for the location of the event in addition to any other needs of the client.

Catering is not a career for those with a low tolerance for details, bustle, and stress. But those who can make it through the first few tough years might find that they don't mind making the cake and having it eaten, too.

Q&A

Q: What are appropriate majors for people interested in pursuing catering as a career?

A: Students interested in catering might consider a major in food science, nutrition, dietetics, culinary arts, hospitality, or bakery science. A degree in restaurant management might also be considered.

Q: How do caterers get their businesses off the ground?

A: Caterers spend the early years developing their identities, defining their menus, and learning to manage their business successfully. Networking is also important. They might work with local restaurants that do not cater and get the owners to recommend them to clients who

need catering services. Unfortunately, many caterers do not last two years in business, due in part to an inability to manage costs, market themselves appropriately, or establish a positive reputation.

Q: Are most catering services large or small establishments?

A: There are some large catering services that employ hundreds of full- and part-time workers, but the majority of catering businesses employ six or fewer full-time employees and hire temporary staff for large events.

SKILLS REQUIRED

A caterer must be a business person, coordinator, supervisor, and salesperson — all in addition to being a great cook.

WHERE/HOW TO GET TRAINING

Schooling

Catering is both complex and competitive, so it is advisable that a person take at least some coursework in business, accounting, and billing. Degrees in restaurant management are also available at many colleges. Many people choose to attend a culinary academy to enhance their cooking skills, knowledge, and repertoire. Those who do not enroll in such a course of study should get some type of professional food preparation experience. Cooking for crowds within a tight time frame is an essential skill that must be learned. The managers of catering services for large hotels or restaurants typically have a bachelor's or even a master's degree in culinary arts. Usually a caterer must have a license to operate a business, and the premises and kitchen must meet health and safety measures and pass regular health

board inspections. The National Association of Catering Executives offers a certification course for caterers and provides grants and scholarships for college. A young person interested in becoming a caterer can begin learning while in high school by working in a restaurant or by helping with church or club dinners. **Financial Aid** Grants, scholarships, loans, and work/study programs are available for college students. For most of this aid, prospective students must submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid, which is available from high school guidance offices and post-secondary schools education financial aid offices. For more information on federal financial aid programs, or to apply electronically, visit the U.S. Department of Education's Web site at <http://www.ed.gov>.



For more information on federal financial aid programs, call (800) 4FEDAID

FUTURE JOB OPPORTUNITIES

Experts say catering services are growing rapidly and will continue to grow through 2010. Competition is keen from restaurants and

supermarkets, but skilled caterers that are capable of handling large, expensive events will have an edge.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

While working at a construction site, carpenters often wear hard hats, work boots, and protective goggles, especially when using power

equipment. Carpenters are typically qualified to work with a variety of hand and power tools.

RESOURCES - HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

BOOK:
The Food Service Professional Guide to Successful Catering by Soni Bode
GENERAL:
• National Association of Catering Executives
Ste. 328 5565 Sterrett Place
Columbia, MD 21044
<http://www.nace.net>

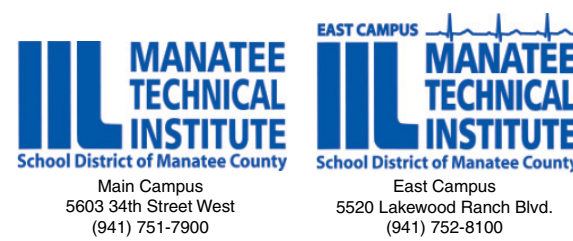
• Educational Foundation of the National Restaurant Association
Ste. 140
250 S. Wacker Dr.
Chicago, IL 60606
www.nraef.org/

Catering is often found in curriculum guides as culinary arts.

YOU HAVE THE POWER

The Job Center page is published every Thursday in the Bradenton Herald. Provided by Newspaper in Education Brandy Braver, Newspaper in Education Coordinator (941) 748-0411 ext. 5031. E-mail: bbraver@heraldtoday.com Creative Design KRP Inc. and Julie Beacham-Hooie, Ad Designer

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JOBS IN THIS FIELD

| Job titles | Place of work | Kind of work | Average salary* |
|----------------------------|--|--|--------------------|
| Caterer | Home, restaurant, or hotel | Chooses menus, prepares food, coordinates and directs an event, supervises staff, and keeps books. | \$19,000–\$49,000+ |
| Sales and catering manager | Hotel, convention center, large restaurant | Works with clients to coordinate menus and other needs for special events. | \$28,550–\$39,500 |

*Salaries may vary depending on region and experience. Sources: Chronicle Guidance Publications and Occupational Outlook Handbook.