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Personal chef Ted Hallson and server Erin Anderson prepared hors d'oeuvres for a recent political fundraiser at the home of Vance and Darin Opperman in Wayzata.

## Busy clients enlist professional help in the kitchen

• For evenings when Chinese takeout just won't do, well-heeled families turn to a personal chef.

By JEREMY IGGERS • jiggers@startribune.com

When juggling the demands of work, family and entertaining gets to be too much, Darin Opperman of Wayzata knows just whom to call: Chef Ted.

She calls Ted Hallson in to cook for special occasions such as birthdays or Thanksgiving. Or just to make a week's worth of the family's meals to freeze.

"For me, it's painless; I make one phone call and Ted knows what to do for me," Opperman said.

With two children at home and two high-powered jobs — she works in human resources for a Minneapolis law firm and husband Vance is CEO of MSP Publications and principal of a private investment company — the Oppermans have a very full plate.

### ◀ CHEF FROM D1

Having a personal chef prepare meals from scratch is more healthful than serving store-bought fare, Opperman said, and when her kids were younger, it was a lot easier than taking small children out to a restaurant.

Hallson belongs to a new breed of personal chefs, who offer affluent clients such as the Oppermans a level of individualized service not available from traditional catering companies.

Personal chefs shop for you, cook in your kitchen, and clean up afterward. They range from part-timers with no professional training to moonlighting restaurant chefs. If the price is right, even such well-known local chefs as Doug Flicker of Auriga or Steven Brown of Levain will cook for a private dinner party.

That makes it difficult to estimate the number of personal chefs in Minnesota: at least three rival personal chef organizations — the American Personal Chef Association, the U.S. Personal Chef Association and the Personal Chef Network — all list Minnesota members on their websites, but some of the most successful personal chefs, such as Hallson, don't belong to any of these organizations.

#### 'A people-pleasing business'

Hallson grew up in Orono and graduated from the prestigious Culinary Institute of America. He worked briefly at Trio in Chicago and the now-closed Grazzi in Minnetonka.

When he started his business 10 years ago, he said, "I really just worked my butt off, working seven days a week, nonstop." And now that his business is firmly established, with a loyal clientele, it's still a lot of hard work. "I am a yes person. To be in this business, you have to be — it's a people-pleasing business."

That close relationship with his clients is one big difference between a personal chef and a caterer, though the boundary isn't sharply drawn. While a catering service may send out a different team of cooks and servers each time a customer calls, Hallson's clients expect him to appear in person. Over time, he has developed relationships with the families of his most regular customers, getting to know family members' likes and dislikes.

Recently, Hallson was in the Oppermans' spacious kitchen, putting the finishing touches on trays of appetizers for 60 for a political fundraiser.

It was mostly toothpick fare — lamb meatballs with a rosemary mint glaze, coconut chicken with a curried creme fraiche dipping sauce, and bits of beef tenderloin topped with melted smoked Tillamook cheddar. Hallson declined to say how much the Oppermans paid for their appetizer party.

In general, he said, he charges a minimum of \$125 plus ingredients for a home delivery when he is working solo, but when he stays longer, or brings along servers or bartenders, the cost can



Anderson offered lamb meatballs with a rosemary mint glaze, coconut chicken with a curried creme fraiche dipping sauce, and bits of beef tenderloin topped with melted smoked Tillamook cheddar.

#### COOKING WITH CHEFS

**Chef Ted Hallson** can be reached at Chef de Cuisine, 763-525-1700. His website is [www.chefedmn.com](http://www.chefedmn.com).

**Chef Amy Nadeau** can be reached at 612-239-7525. Her website is [www.chefamy.com](http://www.chefamy.com).

For other options, see [www.personalchefsearch.com](http://www.personalchefsearch.com).

mount quickly. At the Oppermans' fundraiser, Hallson arrived two hours early accompanied by a team of three servers and a bartender, who help with setup and preparation before the event begins. The servers each earn \$25 an hour, plus tips, for a minimum of four hours.

For sit-down dinners, such as the birthday party for seven that Hallson recently catered for the Oppermans, the fare can be more elaborate. The menu of three appetizers, an entree and dessert included a starter of seared ahi tuna with wasabi creme fraiche in a phyllo cup, and a main course of lobster-crusted beef tenderloin with a lemon tarragon butter sauce. The tab came to \$115 per person, plus \$120 (including tip) for the server Hallson used.

At both parties, the hosts provided their own wine.

#### Who are his clients?

Hallson said his clients are mostly in the upper-middle to upper income brackets. Sometimes he is hired to provide backup for a host (or more often, hostess), preparing a big dinner party. "They want to do the party themselves,

but I'll take a lot of the work out of it."

Not all assignments are glamorous. One of Hallson's recent assignments was preparing meals for a family with a member going through cancer treatment, whose friends chipped in to pay for several weeks of chef service. Hallson visited the family once a week, preparing entrees and side dishes so that some could be refrigerated and others frozen.

Family meals are a small part of Hallson's business these days, but Amy Nadeau, another personal chef, estimates that it's about half of hers.

"I cook on a weekly basis for some families who don't have time, don't know how, or don't like to cook," Nadeau said. "I basically stock their refrigerator or their freezer for the week."

Nadeau's 5x4 package includes four servings of five different entrees, with a side dish, for \$385, which works out to just under \$20 per meal per person. Her fees for sit-down dinner parties range from \$35 to \$60 per person, plus the cost of ingredients. Typical fare can range from pot roast with potatoes and carrots as a make-ahead meal, to more elegant dishes such as seared foie gras with roasted pears and balsamic reduction, or poached lobster with brandy cream for catered sit-down dinners.

Nadeau, who worked in local restaurant kitchens for more than two decades, was the sous-chef at prestigious Levain in south Minneapolis when she left in 2004 to start her own business. These days she works part-time as pastry chef at the Wedge Co-op, which covers her health insurance, and part-time as a personal chef for private clients.

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