

Private chef focuses on local

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Marinscope Newspapers

Trying to save money this recession? Hire a private chef.

Though that may seem counterintuitive, it's what Elizabeth Howes, owner of Saffron Lane — a private chef and boutique catering company based in San Anselmo — says is working for her clients.

"Before I started working with them they would eat out every night," said Howes. Many people don't have the time, interest or skills to cook the kinds of meals they want to eat. Fortunately, Howes has all three in abundance.

After college, Howes began working in high-end executive-level job recruitment. It was something she "fell into," she said, "but it's not what I loved doing."

Since she had been a little girl, she'd loved cooking. As a kid, she would watch her parents and grandparents cook in the kitchen and travel with them to the farmers' market or all the way out to a farm. On her website (saffronlane.com), she jokes that when other kids were selling lemonade she was selling gourmet chocolate-chip cookies and freshly picked blueberries.

"I loved cooking, but I couldn't make any money doing it," she said.

Eight years ago, Howes

Spirit of Ross Valley

started her own private chef company in San Francisco. But, it wasn't quite what she wanted. After moving to San Anselmo, she came to appreciate the organic, local and seasonal food markets in the area, and decided to change direction. She started Saffron Lane earlier this year, with a heavy emphasis on fresh local food. She works with private clients and will cook them any number of meals, focusing on any issues they find important — such as losing weight or lowering their cholesterol — and she also does boutique catering for events of fewer than 50 people. Clients pay for the food, plus \$50 an hour for Howes' time.

Her local fans aren't the only people who have recognized Howes' flair with food. In 2006, she was a contestant on "The Next Food Network Star." Though she was the second person eliminated and was disappointed that the show seemed to be more about entertainment than eating, the experience served as a boost to her cooking business. She also recently started writing "Bonne Bouche," a column for *sfgate.com*'s local blog section.



Elizabeth Howes is the owner of Saffron Lane, a private chef and boutique catering services company. Photo by Privette

Mostly though, Howes loves cooking, visiting farmers' markets and reading about trends in food. Huge dinner parties are the norm at her house, where her husband is only starting to learn his way around the kitchen, she said.

"I usually go way above and beyond and kill myself, but it's fun for everyone," she

said.

And when she's not taking cooking classes or preparing custom meals for small parties, Howes is enjoying the fruits of her labor.

"I love eating," said Howes.

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