



by Deborah Carver

## Prepared to Think Differently

### Embracing culinary innovation

When clients are on the hunt for something fresh and innovative, Robin Selden and her staff will be ready. As executive chef of Marcia Selden Catering and Events in Stamford, CT, her culinary team developed this month's cover dish for an adventurous client's private dinner party.

Japanese soba noodles, which aren't as starchy as traditional pasta, create a nest for a bowl of caviar. The presentation hides a lemon crème fraiche center, a surprise that guests then swirl together with the noodles and the caviar. "It looks very cool, and then you have to play with it to eat it. The crème fraiche gives the appetizer a big burst of flavor," says Selden.



Amanda Gentile

### TRAINING FOR CREATIVITY

Selden makes time for the culinary staff to create and innovate to keep their menus as fresh as the soba-caviar appetizer. Every month, the culinary team of 12 is given a Chef's Challenge. Selden makes the announcements via poster: chefs have three days to create a brand new menu item from scratch and provide the recipe. Selden bases the challenges on what her sales team is asking for: "For instance, they'll say, 'Robin, I'm so sick of the chicken dishes that we have; we really need to work on chicken.'" The Chef's Challenge is then given a chicken theme.

Selden orders a wish list of ingredients—cost is no object—for her team's entries. After a tasting and presentation, staff members rate and photograph the dishes. The top three are guaranteed places on the menu, although sales typically uses at least 6 of the 12 creations from each challenge. In addition to the satisfaction of winning, the chefs who created the champion entrees are given American Express gift cards. Selden loves the originality that comes out of these training exercises: "I don't care where the recipes come from; a chef can make it up or be inspired by a restaurant, cookbook or a magazine, but it has to be something we've never had on our menus."

Overall, it's not just about the creativity and innovation. The challenges give employees a reason to feel like owners of the company. "Even if it's just creating something as simple as a salad dressing, I just want them to be coming up with what we put on our menus and contributing to the company's success."

### ADVISORY BOARD

The Catersource Advisory Board is made up of respected leaders from all aspects of the catering industry. We are privileged to have access to the knowledge and experience of these illustrious professionals.

**Pauline Hoogmoed**

CEO, Catersource  
Minneapolis, MN

**Mike Roman**

Advisory Board Chair Emeritus, Catersource  
Chicago, IL

**Carl Sacks**

Advisory Board Chair, Catersource,  
Woodland Park, NJ

**Margaret Benson**

National Catering Consultant, Sodexo,  
Altamonte Springs, FL

**Pat Christofolo**

President, ICA / Owner  
Santa Barbara Catering Company  
Tempe, AZ

**Mary Crafts-Homer**

Owner, Culinary Crafts  
Salt Lake City, UT

**Patrick Cuccaro**

General Manager, Affairs to Remember Caterers  
Atlanta, GA

**Larry Green**

CEO, International Event Products,  
Stoughton, MA

**Lisa Hopkins**

President, NACE, Houston, TX

**Glynis Hsylop**

Managing Director, The Forum Company  
Johannesburg, South Africa

**Al Madonna**

Director of Marketing, WNA, Chelmsford, MA

**Dan McCall**

CEO, McCall and Associates  
San Francisco, CA

**Tim McLaughlin**

Senior Vice President, Restaurant Associates  
Central Catering Kitchen, New York, NY

**Russell Morin**

President, RM Group  
Attleboro, MA

**Ingrid Nagy**

Owner, Catering by Design  
Denver, CO

**David Reusche**

National Director of Catering,  
Aramark Higher Education, Philadelphia, PA

**Lisa Richards**

Partner, H Events  
San Diego, CA

**Robin Selden**

Managing Partner/Executive Chef,  
Marcia Selden Catering and Events  
Stamford, CT

**Patti Shock**

Department Chair, UNLV College of  
Hotel Administration, Las Vegas, NV

**Jennifer Snow**

Owner/Director of Operations,  
Catering Creations, Omaha, NE