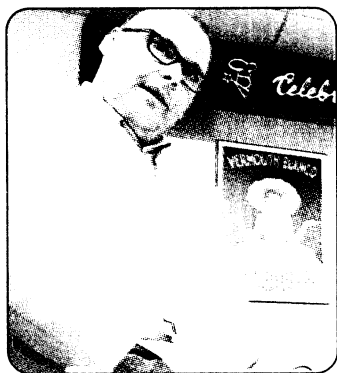




SUCHAT PEDERSON | special to spark

Chef Michael Opdyke shows students at Celebrity Kitchens how to prepare beef tenderloin. From left, Jen Albanese takes notes while Steve Simone, Judy Miller and Diane Stacey observe attentively.

## Cooking at Celebrity Kitchens



JULIE SHAW | spark

### 5 questions for chef Michael Opdyke

- Q. What kind of cuisine do you specialize in?**  
**A.** I'm quintessentially an American cook.
- Q. What kinds of ingredients do you use mostly?**  
**A.** I use ingredients from all over the world, but mostly New World (not European) ingredients, like potatoes, tomatoes, avocados, corn and chilis.
- Q. What type of food do you most enjoy making?**  
**A.** My favorite thing I get to make in the kitchen is Japanese food. The greatest luxury is austerity. I like simple things. Austerity is luxury.
- Q. When you're teaching, what's been the hardest thing for people to learn?**  
**A.** Timing and patience.
- Q. Has anyone ever messed up any dish in a class? Which dish and how?**  
**A.** People have messed up things in the cooking classes, but I don't kiss and tell.

Chef Michael Opdyke puts the fine slab of Australian whole beef tenderloin on the cutting board.

"I did not mean to do that. Do not do that," he tells the Celebrity Kitchens cooking class. "You don't want the meat dripping."

He puts the beef on a towel to soak up the blood, then shows the class how to properly trim it - cutting off the side pieces, slicing the bluish-silver sinew and removing most of the fat.

Don't overtrim, he says, since you need some fat for flavoring.

The 10 members in this Wednesday-night class stand up, watching closely. It's the third of a five-part "Cooking 101" class taught by Opdyke at Celebrity Kitchens.

Opdyke, 40, owner of Wilmington's Michael O. Foods and Wines Inc. catering, wastes no time giving out assignments for the night's meal.

Amie Bliman, 27, of Newark, is already blending potatoes in chicken

broth in an electric blender for the vichyssoise, a cold French soup. Jen Albanese, 29, of Wilmington, measures flour and sugar for the lemon tart dough. Another woman cuts carrots for the purée.

Opdyke tells one woman to set the table. Diane Stacey of Avondale, Pa., gets to work on the beef. Steve Simone, 33, of Wilmington will work with Albanese on the dessert. Someone else gets the wild rice. And so on.

Celebrity Kitchens, owned by Angela Martinez and Cindy Weiner, is a teaching kitchen and restaurant. Classes, taught by guest chefs from area restaurants and businesses, are offered almost daily. In hands-on classes, participants do most of the cooking. In demonstration classes, the chefs do the cooking. And in demo/hands-on classes, it's a bit of both.

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### Celebrity Kitchens Inc.

**Class schedule:** Download from Web site or pick up one outside the restaurant.

**Recommended:** Michael Opdyke's Cooking 101 classes. His next five-part series will be Wednesday evenings in June.

**Where:** Independence Mall shopping center, Suite 33, 1601 Concord Pike, Brandywine Hundred

**Dress:** If you have an apron, bring it. If not, you can borrow one.

**Phone:** 427-COOK (2665)

**Web:** www.celebritykitchens.com

As Simone and Albanese knead the dough into aluminum tart pans, Opdyke watches.

Press the dough harder, to the top, Opdyke tells Simone, demonstrating. It's tempting to be neat, but don't be, he says.

Albanese, a Salesianum School teacher, took this class to learn from Opdyke. Simone, an accountant with Conectiv, has been cooking since high school. He especially likes learning about food preparation.

Everyone's moving busily about, around the wooden tables and chairs, and milling by the chef's Italian granite stovetop counter. The smells of rosemary and garlic, smothered on the beef tenderloin, waft through the room.

Opdyke ties the beef with string, then puts it in the oven for 20 minutes. In another pot, he pours an Italian dry red wine for the wine sauce.

The adjoining tables have been set with candles, vases with pink-and-white carnations, glasses for wine and iced tea and green-linen napkins folded oh-just-so to stand up. Silverware's in its proper place.

Opdyke shows how everything – the vichyssoise, roasted fillet of beef, steamed sugar snap peas and carrot purée, wild rice, the red-wine sauce and lemon tart dessert – are simple to make, even if they sound fancy and difficult.

And the best part of the class is the sit-down meal. Everyone savors what's made.

First, Albanese and Simone serve the vichyssoise. Opdyke tells Albanese to wipe the soup off a bowl

rim. He then shows her how to ladle it without dripping.

Dip the ladle twice into the soup bowl before lifting it out, he instructs.

To the bowls of soup are added dollops of cucumber-dill relish, sprinkles of chives and black pepper and – a treat – a drizzle of truffle oil.

The class toasts with white wine and iced tea. (White wine is fine with red meats, Opdyke says.) Peace and calm settle over the class, as everyone tastes the spring-like soup, which tastes of chicken broth.

Opdyke then shows Albanese and Simone how to serve the main meal – neatly placing the slices of pinkish-red beef (browned on the outside), the scoop of carrot purée and sugar snap peas on the white ceramic dinner plates.

On the empty space, pour the red wine sauce, he says, letting it flow into the meat and vegetables.

Albanese and Simone serve everyone, but Opdyke and Martinez make sure the two sit down and are served themselves.

The beef tastes meaty, a little salty and tender. The carrot purée is deliciously sweet as squash. The rice, absorbing the wine sauce, has a sour taste added to its naturally grainy flavor. And the sugar snap peas are crispy and light, flavored minimally with salt, freshly squeezed orange juice and vinaigrette.

Everyone's all smiles when the lemon tarts are sliced and served with a side kiwi sauce. The sweet sauce complements the sour lemon filling, and the dough tastes as soft as cookie dough. \*

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Beef tenderloin was served with wine sauce, carrot purée and sugar snap peas.

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