



A Laborious Labor Day Weekend

By Dawn Buchholz

dininginbydawn@yahoo.com

My sister was born on Labor Day some 45 years ago so my mom spent the day 'laboring' in a way only mothers can know. When the big day came, my brothers and I were awakened early and transported in the dark to my Grandma Betty's home to stay while the mysterious event occurred. We enjoyed our time there in a strange place.

We were suburban and this was a small farm with two cows and chickens too. My brothers and I were there for about three days enjoying farm life, roosters as alarm clocks and bountiful food served country style. I thought I'd never see so much food on one table again! Soon enough mom and dad arrived to pick us up and present the newest member of our family. It was a Labor Day that was very well remembered and celebrated as we welcomed my baby sister!

Last year for Labor Day I awakened early, was transported to a strange place in the dark where I became familiar with cows (many) and chickens too, well parts anyway, and spent hours preparing and filling tables with massive quantities of food. All day we anticipated the huge undertaking that would be the installation of the first section of the new San Francisco Oakland Bay Bridge; an engineering feat of great magnitude that was scheduled for later that day!

It was a rather different, yet also powerfully memorable Labor Day weekend! I was a member of the catering team that served 600 people breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The diners were Caltrans workers, California Highway Patrol Officers, employees of C.C. Myers, the renowned international bridge builder, as well as local dignitaries involved in the Bay Bridge reconstruction project.

That Friday morning our instructions were to muster at the U.S. Coast Guard station in Alameda, California at 0600 hours. We were issued I.D. badges, helmets, life vests and rubber boots and then boarded a ferry to Yerba Buena Island.

As we traveled out on the deck of the ferry, the sun was just rising and the brisk ocean air whipped invigoratingly in our faces as we marveled at the view that most people never saw! From the water we looked up at the construction taking place in preparation for the big move. The lights strung underneath the bridge twinkled. The huge movie-set lights illuminated the cranes and various large machines. This equipment was needed to construct the supports and to ease the massive section of the bridge inch by inch into place.

The main construction was occurring on the tiny jewel called Yerba Buena Island. The cooking was being done at the historic Nimitz House once owned by U.S. Navy Admiral Chester Nimitz who served in WWII. What a magnificent view of the San Francisco Bay!

This tiny island is the base for the support structure erected at the mouth of a tunnel connecting the two main spans of the double decked bridge. The bridge connects Oakland and San Francisco. For more of the technical details, please see the links at the end of this article.

When we docked on the Island we were shuttled along with bridge workers and officials. They were talking excitedly about the planned events of the day already well underway. We heard stories of their night spent laboring to meet the re-opening deadline of only a few days away! The world was watching...certainly the entire S.F. Bay Area commuter population expecting to resume use of the bridge once the work was complete.

We were thrilled to be part of it all and happy to be able to help feed the hungry workers! We cheerfully disembarked and wandered through the grounds of the gorgeous historic property, through the busy kitchen area to the outdoor kitchen where breakfast was hurriedly being prepared. We were greeted briefly and told to offload our belongings, don our aprons and jump in! What an amazing production to prepare breakfast worthy of the hundreds of hard working people we were serving! Bacon, ham, sausage, eggs, croissants, fruit, bagels, and coffee...oh, the never ending coffee pot!

I watched in wonder at the way the small group made up of some of the caterer's family members and close friends worked in absolute unison to get the food prepped, cooked, served and cleaned up in time to start all over again for the lunch service!

I had never used an outdoor kitchen before but once I had my bearings, I was off and running (well, walking quickly as one never runs in a kitchen... inside or out!) Huge containers of steaming hot food were deftly transported to the buffet, impeccably dressed wait staff stood ready to serve the beautifully displayed delicious breakfast. Only minutes earlier they'd been hard at it over a hot grill! The long line of hungry and touchingly very grateful workers filed past in a stream that lasted an hour and a half! Meanwhile in an elegant small room off the main serving area, some VIP's were served their special omelet breakfast croissant with perfectly cooked bacon, fresh fruit and assorted pastries!

As breakfast was being cleared the inside kitchen was already prepping the luncheon menu items and all the while the ovens were cranking out wonderful cookies! The workers had access to a snack bar open 24 hours a day over the long weekend. It was stocked with cold beverages, whole fruits, candy bars and various other snack items which sustained the crew even when the kitchen was closed.



And there was the coffee. What can I say? How much coffee do you need to keep 600 people alert during the crucial 24 hour shifts that were required to complete this Bay Bridge project on time? Hundreds of gallons per day!

Lunch was a blur, hamburgers and hot dogs, pasta salad and potato salad...but wait, potatoes were for dinner right? Isn't that why I was peeling and cutting one of the 100 pound bags of potatoes at lightning speed? The pure poundage of ingredients that went into these menus was mind blowing yet each dish went out looking, smelling and tasting wonderful with never a hint that it was prepared in five gallon buckets!

After a brief sit down (15 minutes) it was back at it for dinner preparations. Menu was tri-tip, half chicken, roast potatoes, steamed mixed vegetables, corn on the cob and a beautiful tossed salad with cranberries, blue cheese crumbles and walnuts!

Dinner was set to be served at 6:00 but was delayed for an hour as the critical, momentous moving of the segment was slowly inched into place right outside the front door of this incredible mansion! Cheers and wild backslapping ensued and well deserved congratulations were given and received during the dinner that, incredibly survived being held for an hour!

More coffee and dessert followed. Desserts were, I'm sure fabulous and plentiful but truly, this reporter/cook/bottle washer only heard the raves from everyone above the running water and clanging of the huge pots and pans that I was washing over and over and over again! The flow of dirty dishes seemed unending! Thankfully, the task was shared by anybody passing through the wash station willing to step in for a while!

It seems I performed every part of the process! I carefully tended the delicate omelets, shucked what seemed like tons of corn, offloaded the refrigerated supply truck and strung dozens of chicken halves as well as the tri-tips for smoking

in barrels. It all ended with mopping the floors and drying the last sparkling porcelain platter and placing it in its cubby for the next day's use. From 7:00 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., I honestly worked harder that day than I ever had in my life!

We collected our checks, ferried back to our car and departed for home after a day most memorable for its superb teamwork, excellence in production and service of the most wonderful food in quantities unimaginable! Exhausted beyond words and vowing never, ever to do anything like this again I repeated over and over that catering was soooo not the direction I wanted to go with my Personal Chef Service!

I whined about my sore back, dishpan hands and aching feet and then when the call came on Monday I answered with a definitive "YES!" when asked to return again the next day! The request (with an increase in pay to entice those who may be reluctant to re-visit the scene of such overwhelming work) was to feed the last of the crew finishing the job.

This last day was blessedly short as the deadline was met an astonishing 22 hours ahead of schedule! The Bay Bridge re-opened successfully to the relief of tens of thousands of commuters ready to resume their daily travels to and from San Francisco.

The workers departed the site, proudly having been part of one of the most significant engineering endeavors in the state of California! After serving a much smaller version of lunch than Friday's, we packed up both kitchens, sorted rented equipment for return, said goodbye to our new friends with whom we shared so much during our whirlwind catering gig and drove back home... this time over the completed bridge! Mission accomplished!

The talented and creative catering company behind this orchestrated 7 day feast for the masses was Monica Hobbs Catering of Pleasanton, California. She had won the coveted contract and rented the historical estate for the purpose of catering the Labor Day weekend for the bridge crew. She also intended to provide the same great venue for private holiday and other special events throughout the next year! In fact the Halloween party held the following month included a haunted house so popular it was held over to allow more people to see it!

Monica was a gracious employer who was very generous with her thanks for our hard work and compliments to everyone for their extraordinary team effort. I say "Thank you, Monica! I'd gladly do it again and I hear you've renamed your company....Monica Hobbs Extreme Catering!"

It was my pleasure to report about this local event and my participation in it. Perhaps you will have an opportunity in your area to be a part of something grand too! We'd all love to hear about other USPCA Personal Chefs using their talents and abilities to contribute to their communities through delicious food! When we are seen by the public, it promotes awareness of our industry in general and is a great way to promote your own personal chef business or even your local chapter! Get involved!

For a link to this incredible Bay Bridge construction story please go to http://www.mtc.ca.gov/projects/bay_bridge/closure.htm

For a link to an entertaining film in high speed of the project please go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZ3rTq59x5U>

Bay Area

USPCA Chapter Retreat

Strengthening Our Team Building, Marketing and Culinary Skills

By Chef Garbo
www.chefgarbo.com

Last Fall Chef Garbo invited the USPCA Bay Area Chapter to spend a weekend retreat with her in the beautiful Point Reyes National Seashore. They stayed at her family cottage in the charming town of Inverness. The intent of the retreat was to experience culinary field trips to several famous Point Reyes food purveyors, strengthen our bonds as a chapter, and explore marketing opportunities via our new chapter web site. Most importantly, we wanted to have fun while we developed our team building skills and showcased our talents as Personal Chefs.

CULINARY TOURS

The first stop for the fine ladies with big knives was the Hog Island Oyster Company where we tasted several varieties of oysters including the tiny Kumamoto's which were salty and briny and the extra-small Pacific's which were sweet and plump. The Hog Island Oyster Company is a destination picnic spot for oyster lovers. We learned that Chef Suzette was not an oyster fan and had never eaten a raw oyster in her life... So naturally, we didn't leave the premises until she had done so! The next event was at the Cowgirl Creamery in Point Reyes Station where we enjoyed a cheese tasting. We sampled many of their award-winning cheeses including Devil's Gulch, Inverness and Pierce PT which is made from organic whole milk from the Chileno Valley Jersey Dairy, washed in a muscato wine and rolled in dried herbs from the Tomales Bay coastal region. Many of us purchased cheese samples to use in our dinner later that night.

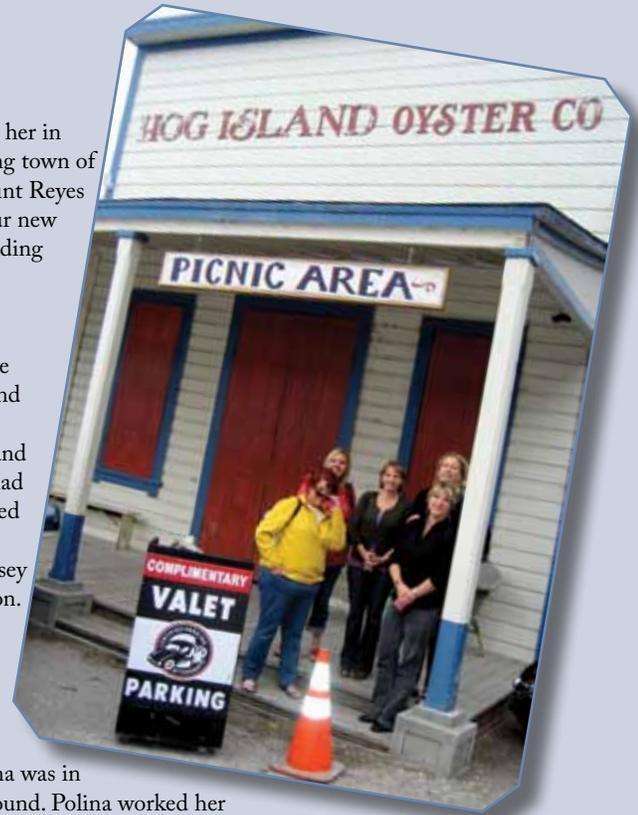
TEAM BUILDING VIA KITCHEN BRIGADE

When we arrived at Garbo's cottage, everyone assembled in the kitchen and executed their mise-en-place. Garbo ran the kitchen brigade and assigned each chef their work station. Polina was in command of the BBQ detail where we indulged in more oysters, only barbecued this time around. Polina worked her grilling magic tending to the old-fashioned kettle charcoal grill. In addition to oysters, she grilled chicken, lamb, beef, and vegetables.



Meanwhile back at the kitchen brigade, Chefs Suzette, Kathy, Renee, Kara, and Dawn prepared their appetizers and side dishes. Chef Garbo took charge of the cocktail detail where she prepared her signature Side Car plus, she filmed numerous mini demos of each Chef preparing their dish while explaining step by step what they were cooking. The purpose of the video session was to practice, review, and analyze our camera presence as well showcase our culinary skills. The end goal is to ultimately post the video cameos, once mastered, on our websites or YouTube to further promote our businesses. Chef Kathy made bruschetta with a Mexican influence as well as a chocolate fruit fondue for dessert. Kara prepared her original recipe for braised pork belly BLTs with balsamic sauce. Renee made a savory asparagus risotto, Suzette prepared a caramelized onion sauce with a Cow Girl Creamery blue cheese for the steaks as well as beautiful mixed berry tart with a honey custard filling and Dawn made her trademark broccoli and tomato salad. In Julia Child fashion, Chef Garbo made sure that everyone's Side Car glass was full.

The Bay Area Chefs:
L to R: Renee, Dawn,
Kathy, Suzette, Garbo &
Kara (center)



MARKETING CHAPTER WEBSITE WITH OUR BLOG

Dinner was a knockout performance which everyone thoroughly enjoyed. The main dinner table discussion revolved around how to exploit our newly developed chapter web site. Garbo announced that the site was officially up and running thanks to Polina Antonova's (pictured right) stellar programming skills. Essentially, Garbo created the content and design and Polina managed all of the back-end programming work. The chapter decided upon the WordPress blogging platform because it's easy to use, cost-effective and has built in Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Garbo stressed that everyone in the Chapter should blog away under our Blog Tab to promote their businesses and get more visibility on the web via our site. The best part is that the chapter is appearing in the #1 spot on a Bing & Yahoo search result when the key words: "Bay Area Personal Chef" are typed which is a very popular search string. Our strategy is to maintain this #1 spot by continuing to add blogging content to our Chapter website. It will take longer to appear on the first page of a Google search due to their different algorithms but we will succeed in time! Check out our site at <http://bayareauspca.com/site/>

All in all, the Chapter had a very productive Retreat. The big take away was to continue to do Marketing, Marketing, and more Marketing and have fun doing it!



Kara's Pork Belly BLT
with Balsamic Vinegar

Garbo's Signature
Side Car Cocktails

