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ProChef Success Stories – Igniting Inspiration

ProChef Level II Success Story Judy Doherty

After graduating from CIA in 1982, I became a pastry chef. I have 15 years of strong industry experience, including 10 years as Executive Pastry Chef for Hyatt hotels. Ten years ago, I began my own company, Food and Health Communications, researching and developing healthy recipes and cooking methods.

Recently, I was visiting the CIA website. I am not sure why; maybe to find a picture of the school to show a friend. But I will never forget my reaction when I stumbled upon their ProChef Certification program. My reaction was nothing short of, "I want that!"

And so my ProChef journey at CIA began.

Since graduation from CIA and my work experience gave me ProChef Level I status, I was able to resume my studies at Level II. From the start, I was optimistic; of the four major culinary competencies listed, I already had two in my pocket: baking/pastry and healthy cooking. I was delighted to see that ProChef II required a command of Mediterranean cooking. Honestly, returning to school had begun as a fun idea. I felt that listing ProChef Level II certification on my FoodAndHealth.com website would be impressive. But now I realized that learning Mediterranean cooking methods would benefit my business.



"Honestly, I went into this ProChef Level II certification looking to get a snazzy little plug on my website, I got so much more. It really wasn't about the destination; it was about the journey. I acquired a much greater awareness for my cooking."

Judy Doherty

So I printed out the study guide and bought some books and videos on the CIA list. I signed up for the Mediterranean Cuisine: Ingredients and Techniques class and then picked a date to take the test in December of 2005.

I found a great resource in David Edens, a California-based chef who took the ProChef II exam. He gave me many helpful tips. But he also gave me a wake-up call: ProChef II involves taking 11 tests over four days. It sounded pretty tough. However, I learned that ProChef II is a stepping stone to the Certified Master Chef test.

Two weeks before the ProChef II test, I was cooking every day to practice. I made pâté and fabricated meat and fish. I practiced making many dishes in Mediterranean cuisine style, and brushed up on aspects of baking, healthy cooking and garde manger.

While I was at the CIA for the Mediterranean cooking class, I made good use of my time. Before each class, I studied the history and culture of the Mediterranean region. The Mediterranean class was taught by a Certified Master Chef Ken Arnone. I really enjoyed making and eating dishes. I also visited the library and ate at all the restaurants on campus, especially the Caterina de' Medici.

Since I enjoyed the Mediterranean class so much, I signed up for the Charcuterie, Smokehouse and Condiment Workshop. Charcuterie proved to be a great decision. Now I was really working hard on my study guide. I talked to many instructors and was surprised at how readily they were willing to share information and tips.

Test week was challenging. The mornings were packed with taking tests, preparing garde manger food items and making menus and prep lists. The evenings were spent on cooking exams, which didn't get us out of class until 7 or 8 p.m.

The first day was baking. I figured it would feel nice to "come out of the gate" on familiar ground. But even that test was challenging for a veteran baker like me. Why? First, you're in a different kitchen from your own with different equipment, ingredients and conditions. Second, you have people watching you. You have to work quickly, neatly and efficiently. You have to serve everything on time. And finally, you have to discuss your day's performance: why and how you made your dishes and what you would do differently the next time.

At the end of each day, I would learn if I passed and was still in the running. I would be relieved. But I also worried about the next day.

By the last day of ProChef II, however, I came to really appreciate this experience. The chefs cared so much about helping us. They went above and beyond to share their knowledge. They emphasized flavor and purpose and the craft of the kitchen that makes us chefs.

Our moderating chef told us on the first day that the ProChef II experience would make us much better chefs. He was right.

Honestly, I went into this ProChef Level II certification looking to get a snazzy little plug on my website, I got so much more. It really wasn't about the destination; it was about the journey. I acquired a much greater awareness for my cooking. Definitely a finer skill level. The CIA chef instructors treated us all as if we were all future candidates for the Certified Master Chef exam. We even had a guest master chef address the class. He had so much wisdom and insight on how to make food taste good and look good and just make sense. He gave us a critique as though we were taking his test. I learned so much and am grateful for that.

I have a whole new set of goals for myself. I want to travel in the Mediterranean and learn even more about that food. I want to visit the spice market of Istanbul. I will concentrate more on making my knife cuts more perfect instead of just going through the motions to get that done. My cooking will have a whole new life and I really love my trade all over again.

I want to go back to the CIA every year for continuing education. And of course I want to take the ProChef Level III course. I am already researching that now so I can fit the Asian, Latin and wine classes into my schedule – and my bags are not even unpacked.

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