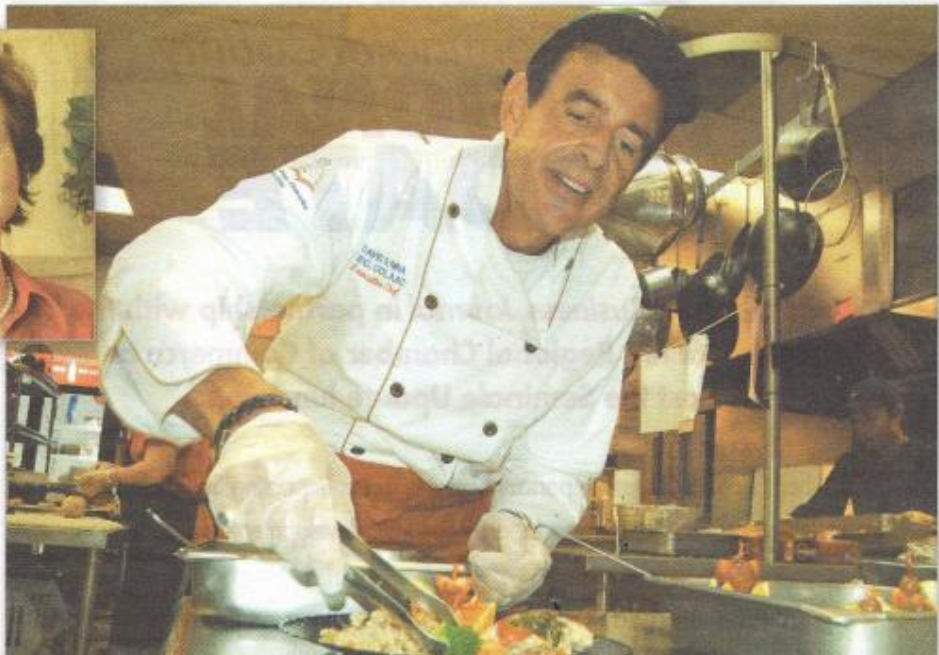




PHOTOS BY JIM CAROCHI

Above: Edibles Etc. owner Sharon Nina. **Right:** David Nina prepares a plate for a catered event.



Gourmet goodies

Edibles Etc. celebrates 30 years of catering to corporate clients

BY MICHAEL CLINTON

At 6 a.m., when many in the corporate world are just waking up, Sharon Nina is busy preparing her next catering delivery for Edibles Etc.

The Altamonte Springs-based gourmet corporate catering company employs 12 and offers a wide variety of foods, using locally grown vegetables as well as herbs from its own garden.

Ironically, the company almost never got started. But after visiting nine banks and being turned down for a loan, Nina was able to open up shop in 1981 with \$20,000 from a family friend after finally landing a \$60,000 bank loan. Her biggest problem in getting financing: She was only 25 at the time, with no experience in running a business.

However, what Nina lacked in management experience she made up for in the kitchen: Nina is a certified executive chef. She also is a certified professional catering executive.

The experience she gained before going into business for herself came as the executive chef for former Florida Gov. Bob Graham, when she was 22, and as an executive chef for the Kirchman Corp., a financial software company in Lake Mary.

After dabbling in selling chocolate-covered potato chips to local bakeries, Nina wanted to be her own boss. She crossed

\$100,000 in Edibles Etc.'s first year and has continued to expand the company each year. Her husband, David, who is also an executive chef, began working with her 11 years ago and helps develop their recipes.

Nina's main secret to success: "Dependability for corporate customers is just as important as the quality of the food," Nina said.

In fact, dependability was why the downtown branch of Bank of America was Edibles Etc.'s first customer and has continued to use the company since.

"She is great to work with. The service and set-up are great — they are definitely our caterer of choice," said Susan Hawk, an administrative support services officer at Bank of America.

Nina also attributes Edibles Etc.'s success to loyal employees who helped the company through some difficult times. For instance, when four hurricanes hit Florida in 2004, Edibles Etc. had a number of job cancellations and closed for a week. But having a good reputation for dependability paid off once again when Nationwide Insurance ordered lunch for 100 people every day that week, Nina said.

Lori Morgan, Florida Hospital Cancer Institute's department secretary, said the dependability and quality are why she's been ordering four to five times a week from Edibles Etc. for the last 10 years.

"They are the most reliable, and time-

Edibles Etc.

Top official: Sharon Nina, chief executive chef

Line of business: Corporate catering

Headquarters: Altamonte Springs

2010 revenue: \$656,000

Employees: 12

Contact: (407) 682-3663; www.ediblesetc.net



liness matters. [Sharon Nina] has pulled together big events at the last minute, no questions asked," said Morgan.

Like most other area businesses, the recession took Edibles Etc.'s revenue down for a period of time, from \$883,000 in 2008 to \$662,000 in 2009, a 25 percent decrease. But Nina believes the catering industry is on the rebound now. In 2010, its revenue dipped only 0.9 percent from \$662,000 to \$656,000, and she expects to increase revenue in 2011 to about \$700,000.

"It's like watching the transformation of a chocolate soufflé," Nina said of the potential rise in business.

mclinton@bizjournals.com | (407) 391-5203