Executive chef brings heart to dining at Yankee Hill Village

For Katrina Ulmer, a love of cooking started long before she stepped into a professional kitchen.

As a 12-year-old, she rushed home after school to watch her favorite Food Network personalities, including Ina Garten, Giada De Laurentiis and Rachael Ray. She pored over cookbooks, experimented with unfamiliar ingredients and created special dinners for her family, introducing them to foods such as radicchio and fennel and homemade vinaigrettes. That early curiosity eventually grew into a career she says always felt like the right fit.

Today, Ulmer serves as executive chef at Yankee Hill Village, where she leads a culinary program that does much more than prepare meals. Through thoughtful menus, resident feedback and a focus on hospitality, she and her team help make dining one of the highlights of daily life for residents.

"My passion for food started at a very young age," Ulmer said. "Culinary itself takes a lot of time and attention, and I have always felt like this is what I was meant to do."

Her path to leadership was not a traditional one. Ulmer joined Yankee Hill Village more than four years ago as a part-time dishwasher. At the time, she was also working an additional job as a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She later moved into the sous chef role before earning the opportunity to become executive chef.

Along the way, she learned lessons that continue to guide her approach. Her first job at age 16 was in a nursing home kitchen, where an aunt who managed the department emphasized the importance of cleanliness and safety. Other experiences reinforced the value of sharing knowledge and never stopping the learning process.

"I truly believe that culinary is a place where you will always learn and grow, if you're willing," Ulmer said. "That is why I love to teach what I know."

At Yankee Hill Village, Ulmer views food as an important part of residents' everyday experience. She wants residents to feel welcomed, heard and cared for whenever they enter the dining room.

"My team and I are here to provide a wonderful experience for them," she said. "I envision that they feel comfortable and happy, knowing that we are doing everything we can to make them feel that their wishes and wants are taken into consideration."



Photos by Immanuel

Katrina Ulmer is the executive chef at Yankee Hill Village.

Resident feedback plays a major role in shaping menus and dining experiences. Through a monthly Dining Room Committee meeting, residents share what they enjoy, what could be improved and ideas they would like the culinary team to explore. Ulmer also makes a point of spending time in the dining room, helping clear tables, talking with residents and asking about their meals.

Those conversations help ensure menus reflect resident preferences while still introducing new flavors and ideas. Seasonal ingredients also influence many of the dishes her team creates. During the fall, for example, butternut squash might appear in a salad paired with feta, dried cranberries and candied spiced pecans. Yankee Hill Village also works with a local provider for seasonal produce and local honey.

Ulmer encourages creativity throughout her kitchen, inviting team members to contribute new ideas. Recent resident favorites, including creamy chicken and noodles over mashed potatoes, originated with members of her culinary staff.

She believes food can play an important role in helping residents maintain their independence, stay engaged and continue trying new things. From themed buffets to elegant holiday meals, the culinary team strives to create experiences that feel more like dining out than institutional dining.

"Food is a big part of people's lives," Ulmer said. "I get to influence a big part of their life, which is food."

For residents at Yankee Hill Village, that passion is served every day, one meal at a time.



Where Great Meals Bring People Together

At Yankee Hill Village, residents enjoy a variety of delicious choices, seasonal favorites, and friendly service, all prepared by our skilled culinary team.

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