

Chewing The Fat

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Jerry Gallegos of Black Tie Catering

A cop-turned-chef who specializes in table-side cooking, etiquette classes and tea parties.

Gwyneth Doland

How did you get into catering?

I grew up in Las Vegas, Nevada in the restaurant business. As soon as I was old enough I started working in the casinos there and I had the opportunity to work under a lot of chefs there. But my true dream was to become a police officer. I moved to Albuquerque because my family was here and I wanted to start a career in law enforcement. So I started the process and in the meantime I worked in hotel restaurants here. I ended up working for the police department for 20 years. Then I retired and thought it would be fun to get back into the restaurant business.

What was your first catering gig after leaving the force?

I had a friend who was also a police officer and he got married and went on a cruise and when they came back he hired me to

do a dinner for his new in-laws and wife. I specialize in table-side dinners where I set up a cooking station right at your dining table and I prepare all of your courses right there.

Do you do a lot of work with your former colleagues?

I've done a couple of functions for them, but most of my work has been through word of mouth. I did one not too long ago at a park because a guy wanted to do something special for his wife. We set up a canopy and . . . arranged a surprise for her at the park. I set an elegant table with roses and candles, crystal and china.

What's your most popular dish?

I get a lot of requests for my wilted spinach (with hot bacon dressing). Bananas Foster is the number one requested dessert. I've actually had people call back and say, "Can we have another dinner and just have that spinach salad and dessert?"

People love bacon, huh?

They do - bacon and Bananas!

I hear you teach etiquette classes for kids, too.

Yes, we divide up the boys and girls and cover everything from telephone etiquette to table manners. We teach them to set up casual and formal tables (Partner C.J.) teaches girls the proper way to walk and to sit. I teach the boys how to polish a pair of dress shoes. And then they get dance lessons and we prepare the meal. They have the opportunity to sit down and put their manners to work. And then we have a dance.

You also do tea parties?

They're very popular for baby showers and wedding showers and for a group of ladies to get together. We bring in our own tables, table cloths, chairs with organza bows, three-tiered stands and an incredible menu to choose from - savories, sweets, tea, everything. I bring a hat stand and collection of hats that they can try on. These little girls, they play the part *so well*.