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By Pat Finan

Vriendschap gets taste of cutting-edge senior cuisine

http://www.pellachronicle.com/community/vriendschap-gets-taste-of-cutting-edge-senior-cuisine/article_5160d672-a75f-11e8-b23f-9f290336e676.html

PELLA - Chef Jeff Ross whetted appetites at Vriendschap Village on Aug. 23 for a new cooking method that makes eating easier.

Thrive Dining turns traditional meals into finger foods, adding dignity to the diets of people who live with swallowing difficulties, Parkinson's Disease, dementia and other conditions, he said.

Ross, an executive chef for Watermark Retirement Communities, Vriendschap's parent company, said any meal can be ground up and prepared in an edible envelope. That might be a crepe, torte, meatball or turnover — anything that a person who struggles to chew food or hold utensils can eat more easily.



“It’s dignity,” Ross told 15 diners who came to try his fare. “That’s what it’s really all about.”

Senior living communities have responded simply to residents eating challenges, he said. For example, those with Parkinson’s disease or arthritis often get a steady stream of sandwiches.

“If my mom was here and I was paying the bills, I’d want her to have something more nutritious than just a sandwich,” Ross said. “Hopefully this solves that problem.”

Another problem is pureeing. Residents on soft food diets often are offered food ground beyond recognition, Ross said.

“It’s pretty much just destroyed and put on a plate like this,” he said, showing Harold Van Maanen an unappetizing sample.

“Would you wanna eat that?” Ross asked.

“Not today,” Van Maanen deadpanned.

Out came a plate of the same ingredients, prepared as a Thrive meal.



“Would you eat this?” the chef asked.

“You bet,” the diner opined.

“This is this,” Ross said, comparing the plates.

“I understand that,” Van Maanen replied eagerly. “Do I get to have first dibs?”

“You sure shall,” Ross laughed. “Let me finish my little spiel, all right?”

Ross then served up a stream of examples of Thrive meals. Chicken parmesan spaghetti is ground and presented as pasta wedges with dipping sauce. Grilled salmon with wild rice and asparagus is turned into a turnover. Meatloaf and peas are cooked as a cupcake, topped with mashed potato frosting.

“Heck,” he said, sizing up his audience, “we could make a fried pork tenderloin crepe if we wanted to!”

Thrive even can bring flavor and dignity back to Thanksgiving, Ross said. Turkey, potatoes, vegetables and stuffing can be baked into a small dinner loaf.

“It’s like Thanksgiving you hold in your hand!” he said.

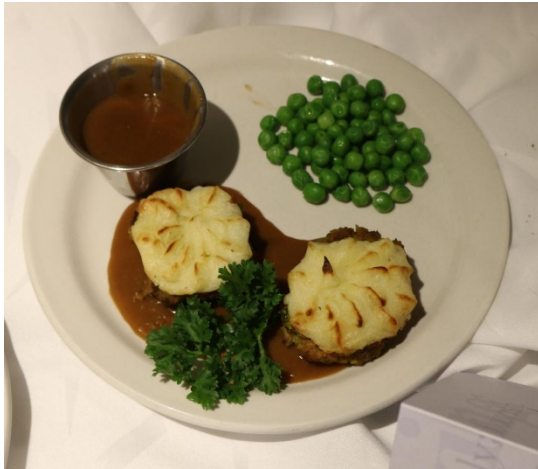
Vriendschap will begin offering Thrive meals in April, Ross said. Most residents will eat traditionally prepared meals but can ask for Thrive meals. Those with doctor’s orders for soft food can choose Thrive or pureed meals, he said.



Ross spent two days training Jessica Hagebock, Vriendschap’s new dining director, in the Thrive approach. That includes serving sorbet at the start of a meal, followed by scented hand towels, all to stir senses and enhance appetites, he said. Thrive gets residents eating again, helping them retain weight and stay active, he said.

Thrive meals are served at no extra cost, Ross added. East Village Place, the Watermark community in Massachusetts where he works, has been serving Thrive meals for two years.

“Watermark said it’s time to do something different,” he said. “It’s going over very well.”



Editor's Note: The Aug. 23 Chronicle contained a story about a Thrive Dining event scheduled for Aug. 30 at Vriendschap. That event will not take place.