

Peddie

FALL/WINTER
2024

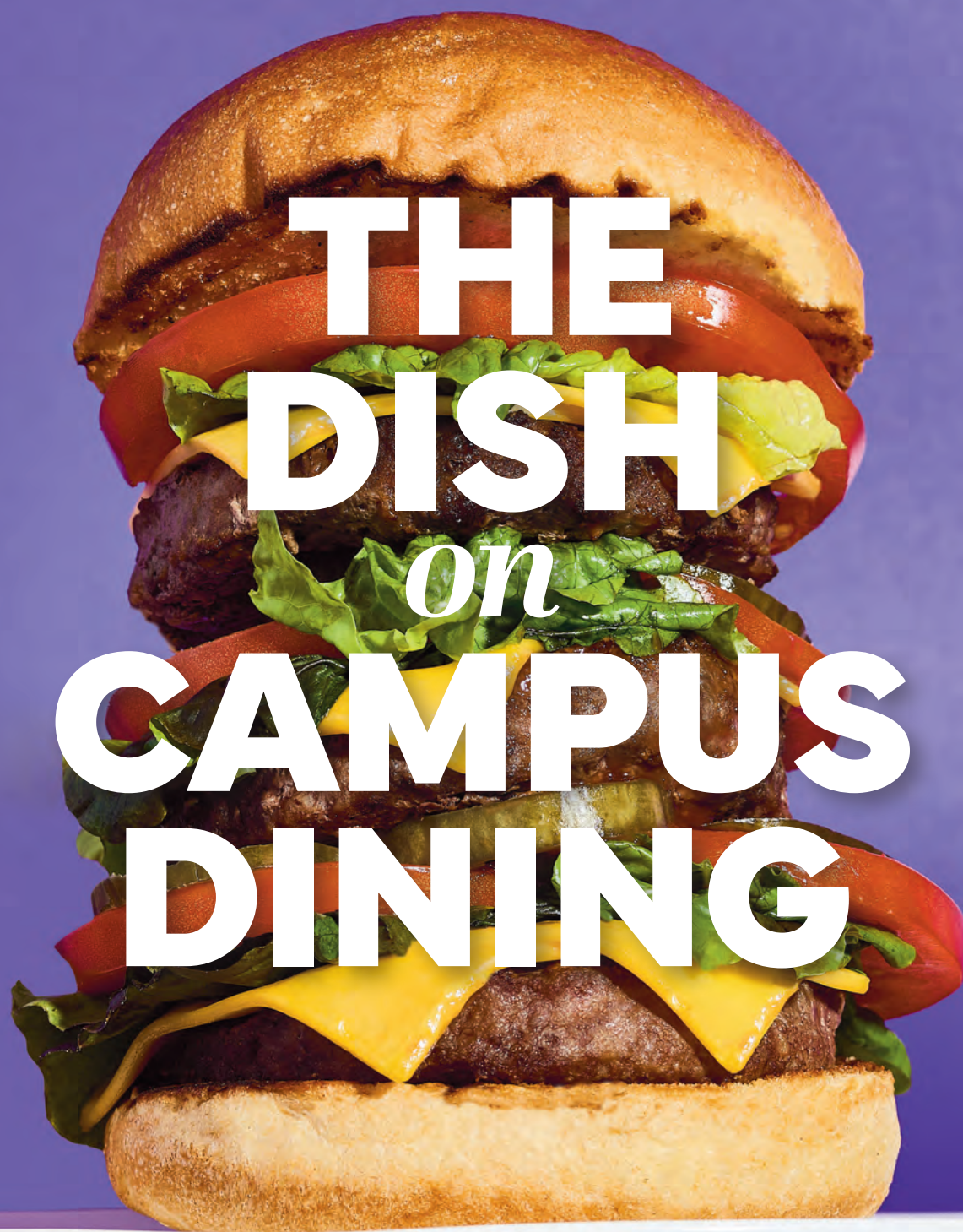
CHRONICLE



THE LEGENDARY "EXPLODING CHICKEN"

THE FOOD ISSUE

DINING HALL CLASSICS,
ALUMNI IN THE FOOD BIZ,
AND HOW FOOD SHAPES
THE PEDDIE EXPERIENCE



**THE
DISH**
on
**CAMPUS
DINING**

**PEDDIE FOOD SERVICE (PFS) GARNISHES
MENUS WITH THE FAMILIAR AND THE FUN**

“PFS has the toughest job on campus because it’s the only department that’s critiqued three times a day.”

Peddie Food Service Director and Executive Chef Jeremy Stahl grins when he recalls former CFO Mike McKitish’s assertion — but then, Stahl tends to view his work as a playful challenge. And one could argue that this is the only sane way to walk the tightrope of trying to feed his clientele — about 530 students, plus 200 full-time employees and families, all with varying tastes and needs — every day.

Stahl joined PFS on a part-time basis in 2007 and in 2012, was promoted full time to sous chef. He changed into executive chef’s whites in February 2020.

The hardest part of the job is trying to please every palate, Stahl says. He knows it’s not possible to do every day, but it’s not for lack of trying. The shortest distance between what’s on the daily menu and a happy clientele is accessibility — a concept he goes out of his way to advertise.



SALTY BITE: ROBIN WOJCIK

“Cheryl Jamison (pictured above) was the unofficial basketball coach. She was a fan. I went with her to the games a couple of times, and she was jumping up in the stands and yelling. One day, the team screwed up, and those boys came through the line to get their lunch. And they came up to Cheryl and were hanging their heads and were like, ‘We’re sorry, Miss Cheryl, we’re sorry.’ She said, ‘Do you think the good Lord would give you six-foot-four inches of height and not expect you to jump?’”

“WE ARE A WORLD KITCHEN.”

— EXECUTIVE CHEF JEREMY STAHL

“When we do the International Student Dinner (in the spring), I always say to the students, ‘If you’re missing a taste of home, email me, and we will make it,’” he said. “‘If I don’t know how to make it, you can get into the kitchen with me and show me how. Send me your mom’s recipe, or your grandmother’s, or your father’s — whoever’s.’ We have never said no to any of their requests,” he continued. “We usually get a lot in the fall. That little taste of home helps.”

A WORLD KITCHEN

A key reason for why Stahl and his staff don’t refuse any requests is because sometimes, they miss the mark on what will or won’t be popular with the Peddie community. Why take a chance?

“Once, by the end of the year, three students were sending me weekly ideas, and I’m not going to lie: With one of the dishes, I was like, ‘This is not going to work; I don’t understand it.’ And then we probably moved more of this special than we ever have of anything else.”



Peddie Food Service sous chef Matthew Walker prepares dinner for hundreds of students, employees and their families.



Peddie Food Service Director and Executive Chef Jeremy Stahl is committed to accommodating special meal requests.

Knowing their clientele is from Hightstown as well as all over the globe galvanizes Stahl and his staff to draw from a wide variety of cultural influences on a regular basis. The team regularly hosts dinners that feature a particular cuisine, along with “the most exciting”: a week that showcases international foods.

“We are a world kitchen,” Stahl emphasized. “African cuisine is huge here. Those dishes became some of our most popular ones. And they’re flavors I’d never done. There’s Asian cuisine; we do three different kinds of rice, and are now doing sticky rice every day.” Dishes like this are typically served as blue-plate specials ... and Stahl doesn’t miss the opportunity to serve them on ceramic blue plates.

Along with heartfelt appeals for certain dishes, Stahl regularly gets requests to carry specialty oils and sauces. “We have a tray full of different kinds, and it’s growing, getting out of control,” laughed Stahl. “But the students are happy.”

LOCAL-FOOD EDUCATORS

Alumni who graduated 15 or more years ago who visit Peddie’s dining hall may see something that inspires a double take: platters of unusual local fruits or vegetables, beautifully prepared, arranged and labeled. PFS works with purveyors who seek out what’s in season at local farms, in and around New Jersey.

SWEET BITE: EXECUTIVE CHEF JEREMY STAHL

What’s the best part of heading up PFS?

“The cast of characters, especially my co-managers, Pam Houskeeper and Jimmy Hamnett, and my sous chef, Matthew Walker. It’s a we, definitely not a me. Second best: the kids. To see them excited about food, happy and smiling; seeing a line upstairs before we open the door; coming back for seconds. They work so hard with their studies. It’s not every career that you can see all of your hard work being appreciated so quickly.”

BLUE-PLATE SPECIALS: A VANISHING TRADITION

The “blue-plate special” once symbolized an affordable, satisfying meal — typically featuring meat, sides and a drink — offered at diners across America from the 1920s to the 1950s. Its roots lie in dining at railroad stops, where budget-conscious travelers and workers were served hearty portions on sectioned blue plates. The concept is believed to date back to 1892, when the Harvey House chain popularized these discounted meals, catering to railroad passengers in the Western U.S.

SWEET BITE: SNACK BAR SUPERVISOR JAMES HAMNETT

"It's been an amazing 30 years working for Peddie Food Service and seeing how much the department has evolved. I had the privilege of working with some hard working colleagues over the years, including my mother, Mae Hamnett, who dedicated herself to the success of the department for 25 years.

"Reunion is one of PFS's greatest days — a day for us to reconnect with former students and reminisce about all the great times they shared with us. They tell us how much they loved our food and that the food at most of their colleges and universities doesn't compare to ours."

"That really started with (Head of School) Peter Quinn, Mike McKitish and other administrators," said Stahl. "They told us, 'regardless of who you are on campus, we're all educators. There are always lessons we can teach the community — especially the students.' We really took that to heart, so we took the initiative and said, 'Let's find some food that you may not find every day. Let's talk about it, let's educate our staff about it.' We love to create, as chefs and as cooks. And I try to use as much Jersey produce as possible."

ADDITION AND SUBTRACTION

Stahl also makes smart ecological choices, regularly recycling and composting. He recently joined Peddie's Sustainability Committee and has "learned a lot," he said.

Earth-friendly choices are also included on PFS menus, with a sustainable food distributor providing much of it. And "all of the seafood we get is sustainable," said Stahl. "Some of it is farm raised, but in an ethical way. We try to play our part."

PFS has evolved further, providing kosher, halal, vegetarian and vegan options on each day's menu. And the department is keenly proactive when it comes to food allergies and intolerances.

*From left: Peddie Food Service employees
Lucy Armstrong and Julie Heymach*



BIG BITE: ROBIN WOJCIK

"Tris and Leigh Wood's oldest, Duncan, would sneak in 10 or 15 minutes sooner than his parents because he wanted to eat cake before they got there. And we knew it, and we'd watch him eat his cake and put his plate on the return, and then he'd be ready for dinner."



FORMER DIRECTOR OF FOOD SERVICE ROBIN WOJCIK

"I was hired in May 1994 and was my predecessor's assistant for nine years. Back then, we served simple fare — a lot of processed food, not a lot of imagination.

"In 2005–07, there was a whole new crew of faculty and they had a lot of expectations and demands. I'd had it drilled into my head not to spend money. It took me and (then Head of School) John Green and (then CFO) Mike McKitish a good six months to go and spend some money. That was really hard.

"We had 700 people who all wanted different things. So who were we gonna be? Mike and I went to see some other schools, and no one was doing anything that was knocking my socks off. So I wrote a mission statement and a vision statement. And then I sat with the staff, asked who we were going to be, and we'd go from there. We made decisions together.

"From 2007–10, we started to turn things around and got our mojo going. Today, 80–85% of the food is made from scratch.

"When Jeremy got promoted, he was the final help I needed to push through what I wanted to get done before I retired. Now it's an operation that's really in touch with the community."

“IT’S ABOUT THE COMMUNITY.”

— EXECUTIVE CHEF JEREMY STAHL

“When I started here 12 years ago, it was only nut and seafood allergies,” said Stahl. “Now there’s a list of eight or nine items, and we hit all of them.” The PFS staff identifies all menu items that contain allergens and also lists them on a public wall on a large placard.

How is Stahl and his team able to keep everyone’s needs straight? By “communicating with the community – getting to know them,” he said. “Students with certain diets, we will make individual meals just for them – their own fryer oil, their own plates. We want people to feel comfortable, not like they’re singled out.

“It’s about the community.”

SWEET BITE: ROBIN WOJCIK

“Janice Brown was an amazing woman. She retired in 2022. I think she was at Peddie for 38 years. She brought her own sense of integrity to everything she did. She never called out of work — hurricane, snowstorm, whatever. I would watch that woman never miss a trick, never burn anything. It was amazing to be in her presence. And she loved those kids. ‘They’re my kids,’ she would say. She went to the recitals. She went to the Dec Contests. She went to the recitals. She’d be annoyed by something that someone burned and would wrinkle her nose and say, ‘Not for my babies.’”



Student clubs and organizations, like Bon Appétit (left) and the Jewish Heritage Alliance (right), embrace food as a central part of their activities.

BREAKING BREAD AND BUILDING BONDS

For Greg Wriede, director of student leadership and student activities, food is key in fostering community and creating memories. From informal gatherings to campus-wide events, Wriede sees food as an opportunity for students to form bonds beyond the classroom.

“Food drives contact between our students, faculty and community as a whole,” Wriede noted. “Whether it’s a late-night snack in the dorm, an all-school barbecue or our traditional Family Style Dinners, food encourages our community to gather in spaces that foster conversations and connections.”

Wriede pointed out that student clubs and organizations embrace food as a central part of their activities. “Our Bon Appétit Club, for example, has hosted all-school BBQs and other meals for student mental health breaks. Also, our Japanese Culture Club hosted sushi-making, which was a huge hit last year.”

When planning student activities, Wriede always considers how food can enhance the experience. Some recent favorites include waffle fries, grilled cheese nights and nostalgic snacks like Dunkaroos, Gushers and Fruit Roll-Ups during exam breaks. “Food encourages students to show up and stay a little longer, giving them more time to connect with their peers,” Wriede said.

I love breakfast food, and the French toast always hit the spot after morning swim practice.

— *Bryce Hillman '07*

The infamous small BLT! Food service served us just one small BLT for lunch. Hungry young men need more! A ruckus began in the corner of the Wilson dining hall, a pounding of the tables with the chant, “We want seconds.” In just moments, the entire student body was in revolt. Dean DuBois jumped up from the head table, shouting, “The next boy to make a sound is out!” All quiet broke loose as Mr. DuBois stormed back to the kitchen. Minutes passed. Then, out came seconds. Mr. DuBois was our hero!

— *John M Roberts '70*

As a new student, I kept hearing rumors about the mysterious “Exploding Chicken,” a Family Style staple that had apparently ruined a generation’s worth of students’ ties, slacks and dresses. Our dorm prefects regaled us with tales of unsuspecting students doused in butter as they unknowingly cut into the harmless-looking Chicken Kiev. My mind ran wild when I heard it was on the menu one Fall evening. I approached the dish as if I was about to embark on a major surgical procedure. To my surprise, the “explosion” was nothing more than a little pop of butter. Not only did I survive the chicken bomb, but it was actually pretty good!

— *Alexander Dacey '03*

Chicken fingers.

— *Aidan Lawrence '26*

Beef stew on noodles.

— *Jennifer Orlick '81*

Breakfast hash browns were always a go-to.

— *Matt Pustay '02*

Pork roll and cheese sandwiches for lunch were my favorite.

— *Mark Gartner '84*

Muffins on Thursdays! Would not miss this day for the world, and Cheryl would be passing them out with a big smile, making the whole thing amazing.

— *Cal Rohde '12*

Thursday muffins! With Cheryl serving and smiling, of course! “Exploding Chicken” at Family Style.

— *Megan Hill Grewal '97*

WHAT'S YOUR ALL-TIME FAVORITE DINING HALL DISH?

“Exploding Chicken.”

— *Beth Strum '94*

“Exploding Chicken” and the muffins on Thursday mornings!

— *Lauren Smedley '09*

I like “Exploding Chicken,” chicken nuggets and chicken cheddar wraps.

— *Kohana Brown '25*

“Exploding Chicken” and flank steak were a fave!

— *Katherine “Kate” (Ridgeway) Lobben '11*

Loved “Exploding Chicken” and Muffin Day.

— *Sarah Letter '02*

All-time favorite dish was Chicken Kiev, aka “Exploding Chicken.”

— *Peter Cao '05*

Chicken Kiev is my all-time fave.

— *Celine Hau '03*

Chicken Kiev. That's it. That's the story.

— *Alex Valentino '13*



“Exploding Chicken,” aka Chicken Kiev. It was always fun to see who at Family Style meals would get absolutely demolished by the hot melted butter. Plus, it was delicious!

— *Jennifer (Prostoff) Braciak '11*

Chicken Kiev, aka “Squirting Chicken,” might’ve been the favorite and the scariest.

— *Lauren (Laurie) King '88*

The most fun was “Exploding Chicken” (aka Chicken Kiev), especially the first Family Style they served it at each year!

— *Julie Saker Schlegel '90*

Dining hall memories at Peddie are packed with tales of “Exploding Chicken,” early morning treats and the comfort of timeless favorites. We asked students and alumni to share their favorite dining hall dishes, and their responses reflect not just the food they loved, but the memories and connections that came with them.

My Peddie dining experience was defined by learning to eat incredibly fast. If I didn't, I could not finish a complete meal, especially as a freshman and sophomore when upperclassmen essentially dictated your portions. To this day, 55 years later, I am still a speed eater.

— Roy Grossman '70

A special memory is Muffin Day. I would always be one of the few at the dining hall early enough to get one, so I would always grab an extra for my roommate, Courtney, who liked sleeping in.

— Brooke Maria (Azcu) Eriksen '08

Char Siu pork buns.

— Megan Cheng '27

BBQ ribs.

— Siwoo Jeong '27

Breakfast for dinner.

— Liam Ruiz '26

Chicken nuggets.

— Eason Wang '27

Chicken nuggets were my favorite.

— Bridgette McKnight '10

Turkey Divan was my favorite. It was only served at Family Style Dinner. Before I tried that dish, I had never eaten broccoli, but it turned me into a broccoli lover and got me to try other foods I never thought I would enjoy. When I went home for a break and told my mom I liked broccoli, she almost fell out of her seat. It was a miracle! Peddie got me to try broccoli.

— Bill Volckening '84

Chicken breast, BBQ ribs.

— Andrii Golubchuk '26

Shepherd's pie! Never had it before Peddie.

— Jay Gorry '57

Corn fritters and Canadian bacon.

— Jennifer Miksis-Olds '92

Peaches and cream for dessert.

— John Wall '51

The salmon salad, berry smoothies and pork buns.

— Ivy Zhao '25

Oddly, potato chips and cottage cheese come to mind. Hey, it was the 80s.

— Stephanie Martin '91

I loved the waffle bar at Sunday brunch (if I woke up in time!) For lunch, Pierogi Day or Chicken Nugget Day were always favorites of mine. For Family Style, the Chicken Kiev ("Exploding Chicken") with wild rice was definitely the best.

— Morgan Fagioli '09

Definitely the yucca fries blue plate.

— Anjali Sudarshan '25

Muffin Thursdays and chicken cheddar wraps.

— Christine Lee '08

I would sit next to the teacher to get first pick at the food. One I remember was chipped beef on toast.

— Sam Havens '61

Brunch (after Saturday classes) was by far the best meal. My roommate and I would try to outdo each other until we eventually ended up with the toast-egg-cheese-bacon-sausage-hash brown double-decker sandwich.

— Robert Zakon '86

Chicken cheddar wraps.

— Fred Sullivan '26

The mystery meat that had a sheen which glowed in several colors, red, green and brown, once reputed to be kangaroo! We swallowed it often, even if suspect.

— John Roberts '70

Chicken cheddar wraps.

— Nicholas Massenburg-Abraham '17

Chicken cheddar wraps, taco night and the salmon rice dish!

— Olivia Dewar '24

Chicken cheddar wraps.

— Gabriel Spadaccini '13

Sunday morning waffles were the best.

— Chris Ransom '06

Vegetable chili.

— Ayaan Nagarkatti '27

Anyone else remember what we called creamed chipped beef?

— Steve Cole '60

Roast beef and mashed potatoes (even if mixed with condensed formula) smothered in gravy. Yum!

— Richard Gerweck '78

Every once in a while, they did a make-your-own potato bar, and that was my favorite.

— Jon Siegel '91



FEEDING MINDS

Peddie's food-focused lessons equip students to tackle global challenges.

Peddie students work with Science Teacher Madeline Cozine in the school garden, where students grow vegetables to donate to local food pantries.

At Peddie, food is more than just a subject of study – it's a gateway to understanding complex social, environmental and cultural issues. Students learn to navigate the connections between what's on their plates and the world around them, preparing them to tackle some of the most critical global challenges.

SCIENCE MEETS SUSTAINABILITY

In AP Environmental Science, Nika Blank '16 leads her students through the tactile process of growing microgreens, a hands-on project designed to teach them the intricacies – and fragility – of food production. The challenge isn't just cultivating the greens but realizing how a minor oversight, like missing a watering session, can devastate a crop.

But the most striking revelation comes when students realize their disconnect from the very food they've grown. "Some ask, 'Wait, we can eat these? Is it safe?'" Blank recalled, highlighting how distant many students are from their food sources. It's a revelation that carries weight, especially as Blank pushes her students to think critically about sustainability and the scale required to feed a growing population.

Blank recalled an eye-opening moment when Peddie Food Service Executive Chef Jeremy Stahl and Catering Manager Pamela Houskeeper visited her class to discuss the logistics of feeding the school. "The students were surprised at the cost variation, and how produce can sometimes be the most expensive item on Chef Jeremy's shopping list," Blank said. It was a stark reminder that feeding a school mirrors the global struggles in producing affordable, sustainable food.

A TASTE OF CULTURE

In Peddie's French classes, food is essential to learning about culture. French Teacher Nathalie Letourneau moves beyond traditional language instruction to explore the significance of meals in society. "It's really about how much cultural knowledge and competency we can develop in students," she said. "And food is such a great gateway for that."

In French III, students explore the traditions surrounding mealtimes, while those in French IV dig into the history of the Michelin Guide and its influence on global culinary prestige. By AP French, students are exploring critical global topics like food insecurity and the debate over genetically modified organisms. Along the way, they make crêpes in the dining hall and brew traditional Moroccan mint tea, finding that language, like food, is best digested with experience and reflection.

FOOD AS A PERSONAL NARRATIVE

While science teaches the mechanics of food production, art delves into its emotional resonance. Joyce Chen, who teaches Drawing and Painting, asks students to illustrate or paint dishes that hold deep personal significance in her food autobiography project. Whether it's a beloved childhood snack or a traditional

“The goal is for students to reflect critically on how food is shaped by their lives and communities.”

— JOYCE CHEN, ART TEACHER

family meal, the students’ art reveals how food is tied to memory, culture and identity.

“The goal,” Chen said, “is for students to reflect critically on how food is shaped by their lives and communities. I want them to think about the systems, values and traditions that shape their food choices and, ultimately, who they are.”

What begins as an intimate exercise in nostalgia quickly becomes a broader examination of how personal identity and cultural history are entangled in what we eat. From family traditions to the impact of globalization on local cuisines, Chen’s students gain a layered understanding of the role food plays in their lives.

THE SCIENCE OF EATING

In Madeline Cozine’s Food Science course, students are invited to step into the kitchen as both scientists and chefs. Here, they experiment with cooking techniques while engaging in broader discussions about food production’s ethical, social and environmental implications. Beyond the classroom, students venture into community-based projects, growing vegetables alongside Peddie’s environmental club members to donate to local food pantries, emphasizing the connection between scientific knowledge and social responsibility.

PERFORMANCE ON A PLATE

Jordi Serrato’s Sports Science class tackles nutrition from an entirely different angle, teaching students how to fuel their bodies for optimal athletic performance. “I want to teach them the basics — like nutrition requirements and reading a food label — and build it from there,” Serrato said. From understanding macronutrients and hydration to meal prepping for specific athletic goals, students learn how food choices can enhance their physical and mental capabilities.

Serrato takes it further by encouraging his students to engage with the ethical dilemmas of sports nutrition, including debates on performance-enhancing drugs and supplements. This focus on sports nutrition reflects a holistic understanding that food not only fuels the body but also shapes athletic integrity and ethical decision-making.

Peddie students explore the connections between personal identity, cultural history and food.



CAMPUS CRAVINGS

From the warmth of a fresh chocolate chip cookie at The Grille to the juicy goodness of a burger at the old Canteen, Peddie's campus snacks have been a tasty tradition for generations. We asked students and alumni to share their favorite go-to bites.

THE GRILLE

Warm chocolate chip cookies in The Grille. They were huge and so good, plus Fran always served them up with a smile.

— *Lauren Einhorn '08*

Warm cookies at The Grille.

— *Julia Ulrich '25*

Cookies from The Grille!

— *Charis Chien '27*

Annie Bortey '06 and I always got bowtie donuts from The Grille during DMX.

— *Allie Rich '06*

Cookies from The Grille!

— *Caitlin McCorkle '07*

They had these twist donuts at The Grille that were about a buck. Washing that down with a 99 cent Arnold Palmer gave me the fuel to get through some late nights of study!

— *Alexander Dacey '03*

Fresh chocolate chip cookies remain a favorite at The Grille.

The Dunkin' Donuts muffins in The Grille. Even better is the memory of Fran, who always asked, "Want a muffin, honey?" when you walked up to order. She had such a sweet and unique voice. I still use this phrase in my best Fran voice with my kids today.

— *Jennifer Miksis-Olds '92*

Warm chocolate chip cookies at The Grille.

— *Jennifer (Prostoff) Braciak '11*

Big cookie and a Mountain Dew Code Red from The Grille.

— *Brian Chaszar '02*

THE ANNENBERG CAFE & THE PEDDIE STORE

Biscoff cookies or jalapeño chips from the Annenberg Cafe.

— *Aarushi Gupta '26*

Haribo gummies from The Peddie Store.

— *Dasyer Bullock '26*

Chocolate Hello Panda Snacks from the Annenberg Cafe.

— *Grace Lee '26*

Hi-Chew from the Annenberg Cafe!

— *Sophie Liz Wang '27*

Cold chocolate milk from the Annenberg Cafe, paired with Hello Panda.

— *Ophelia Ni '26*

A Stewart's root beer from the bookstore was the perfect post-chapel drink. In the winter, I'd grab a couple before chapel for my friend and me, then deposit them in a snowbank. When we got out, they were perfectly frosted, and we didn't have to wait in line for anything before the long block.

— *Bryce Hillman '07*



THE CANTEEN

Toasted roll with jelly and butter from the Canteen. 10 cents.

— *Thomas Bifano '76*

Drake's Cherry Fruit Pies. I went to the Canteen almost every night for a pack. Still eating them today.

— *Bart M. Rogers Jr. '75*

Bagels and Snapples from Frannie in the Canteen!

— *Nicole Rossi O'Brien '95*

I liked the Canteen's cheeseburgers in 9th grade.

— *Claude Elenewich '75*

Fried onion sandwich on a hard roll. 10 cents in the old Canteen.

— *Wes Lawson '76*

Fried bologna sandwich at the Canteen. 20 cents.

— *Richard Benes '65*

The Canteen. I remember the French fries.

— *Gerard Fritz '81*

Canteen. Rose Lipszic Hayet '72 and I would go. Cherry Coke and matchbox football.

— *Deborah Tiffitt-Tufts '72*

Not even a question: Frannie's chocolate chip cookies from the Canteen.

— *Jonathan Besler '98*

Burger at the Canteen.

— *Bob Dunne '71*

I worked part-time in the Canteen. A favorite snack for myself and many others was a grilled hard roll done on the flat top.

— *Mary Stella '75*



Peddle students enjoy snacks and conversation in the late 1960s at the Canteen, a favorite campus hangout.

Muffins in the Canteen! Fran behind the counter would say, "Can I help you, hon?" "Muffin, please." "Blueberry or chocolate chip?" "Chocolate chip!"

— *Marisa Coppola Procopio '87*

A burger and chocolate milkshake at the Canteen. Sometimes, when busy, we got to go behind the counter to make our own.

— *Robbie Lobban '74*

Went to the Canteen for greasy burgers.

— *David Mintzer '71*

Canteen. The milkshakes, of course!

— *Sharon Evans '63*

Grilled cheese from the Canteen.

— *Lisa Gonnella '86*

Anyone from my era is going to say the apple bombs from Frannie at the Canteen.

— *Kevin Sanderson '92*

Probably milk.

— *Dave Ennis '58*

Hostess Apple Fruit Pies from the Canteen.

— *Kathryn Riley Andrew '84*

Canteen. I would have a glazed donut pretty much every day.

— *Stephen Bratcher '69*

Hamburger at the Canteen.

— *Paul Rossos M.D. '72*

A coffee roll donut from the Canteen, always saved for me by the lovely Frannie who would set it aside knowing I'd be in to buy it before lunchtime.

— *Amy Elkes-Simon '95*

Fries from the Canteen coupled with Super Mario Bros.

— *Jon Siegel '91*

Between classes, there was a stop at the Canteen for a Ring Ding and a Cherry Coke.

— *Ted Brooks '64*



ALUMNI



FOOD



INDUSTRY



IN THE

NINE ALUMNI SHARE INSIGHTS FROM VARIOUS ROLES IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY, FROM BUSTLING RESTAURANTS TO VITAL EFFORTS IN TACKLING FOOD INSECURITY AND ENHANCING TODDLER NUTRITION. THEIR EXPERIENCES HIGHLIGHT THE MEANINGFUL WAYS IN WHICH FOOD CONNECTS US ALL.

SPICING UP THE CULINARY WORLD

CINDY GILBERT '95

As McCormick & Company's culinary development manager, Chef Cindy Gilbert '95 is the creative force behind recipes enjoyed by millions. Gilbert's culinary adventure surprisingly began not in a kitchen but at Christie's Auction House in New York City. Immersed in the city's vibrant culture, the art history major discovered a new passion that would ultimately reshape her career.

"New York City has a pretty robust food scene," said Gilbert. "It was there that I decided to transition into the food industry." With that revelation, she pivoted from fine art to fine dining.

Eager to dive into her newfound calling, Gilbert relocated to Boston, where she split her time between an internship at America's Test Kitchen and night shifts as a line cook at an upscale seafood restaurant. The dual experience offered valuable insights into meticulous recipe development and the fast-paced restaurant industry.

"It showed me that restaurants are definitely not for me," Gilbert admitted. "It was the recipe development side of things from America's Test Kitchen that I fell in love with because it speaks to my type A personality that loves the minutiae and why this works or doesn't work."

Determined to hone her skills further, Gilbert returned to New York to study at the Institute of Culinary Education. Her career blossomed with positions in the test kitchens at "Good Housekeeping" and "Family Circle" before she joined McCormick in 2014.

Gilbert's role at McCormick is wide-ranging. She develops recipes for product packaging and the company's website, coordinates photo shoots, and ensures that home cooks experience McCormick's flavors at their finest, just as the company's food scientists intended. Her influence extends to product innovation and high-profile campaigns, including the buzzworthy

French's mustard ice cream she helped develop for National Mustard Day in 2019.

Gilbert has been influential in popular licensing collaborations like Old Bay Seasoning Goldfish and Frank's RedHot Goldfish. This season, she's especially excited

"New York City has a pretty robust food scene. It was there that I decided to transition into the food industry."

about the launch of new holiday finishing sugars. "Working on those big holiday campaigns is really, really fun," she said.

Through it all, Gilbert finds deep satisfaction in her work: "I love my job because it allows me to have a real, tangible impact on people's lives — helping them enjoy life more through the food we eat and the meals we share."



THE RISE OF AN ICONIC DINING EMPIRE

ELLEN KORETZ
BROMBERG '80



In 1992, Ellen Bromberg '80, her husband, Eric, and his brother, Bruce – both chefs – took a leap of faith and opened Blue Ribbon Brasserie in New York City's Soho. What started as a single restaurant has since blossomed into Blue Ribbon Restaurants, a renowned culinary empire with 20 locations spanning multiple states, many specializing in sushi and Japanese-inspired cuisine. Among their most iconic dishes is Blue Ribbon's fried chicken, a signature

noting Blue Ribbon's staff numbers around 1,000. "It's a balancing act to make sure everything is done the way we want, every day, in every location." Despite the challenges, she finds it incredibly rewarding to provide so many people with jobs and to witness their growth alongside the restaurant group. "We value

“It's a balancing act to make sure everything is done the way we want, every day, in every location.”

favorite born from a spontaneous kitchen experiment that has delighted diners for over 30 years.

"The story behind the fried chicken is actually funny," Bromberg explained. "One evening, the kitchen had a bowl of egg whites left over from making crème brûlée, and there was matzah meal on the counter. My husband had the idea to use those ingredients to make a crust for fried chicken, and it came out great!"

Running a successful restaurant group comes with challenges, and staffing remains one of the most demanding aspects of Bromberg's role. "There are so many moving parts, and so many employees," she said,

our staff, and seven of our original ten employees are still with us today."

Bromberg continues to expand the Blue Ribbon brand. Their latest ventures include two restaurants in Las Vegas – a sushi spot and a Mediterranean-inspired concept – further enhancing an already impressive portfolio across Los Angeles, Miami and beyond.

For aspiring entrepreneurs, Bromberg offers simple but sage advice: "It's a tough business with a high rate of failure that requires a ridiculous amount of hours, but as for my family, I can't think of anything else we would rather do."



CULTIVATING SOLUTIONS FOR GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

FRED DAVIES '67

As a horticulturist and plant biologist, Fred Davies '67 has spent his career tackling one of the world's most pressing issues: how to feed an ever-growing population sustainably.

"We've got this wicked problem," Davies explained, referring to the challenge of feeding an additional billion people in the next 13 years. "It's a problem that you can't easily solve. A lot of times when you fix one part of the problem, you create other problems you've got to deal with."

“Nutritious food should be a universal right.”

Davies' journey into the world of horticulture began with humble roots in Cranbury, New Jersey, where he and his three younger brothers attended Peddie as day students. As a teenager, Davies worked on local potato farms, gaining practical experience that would later influence his career path. However, it wasn't until after college, during a year-long backpacking trip around the world with a horticulturist friend, that Davies found his true calling.

"About three months into our travels, we were in Mexico and decided, 'Hey, let's start to focus on agriculture and horticulture,'" Davies recalled. This decision led them to visit research centers, farms and plantations worldwide, igniting Davies' passion for the field.

Throughout his career, Davies has worn many hats. He's worked on enhancing production systems for the green industry, collaborated with NASA on their "Salad Bowl" program to grow plants in space, and spent over 30 years studying beneficial

soil microorganisms. His work has taken him from the high altitudes of Peru to the laboratories of Texas A&M University.

Davies emphasized the critical distinction between food security and nutritional security. "Food security is about having sufficient calories," he explained, "but nutritional security involves having adequate minerals, micronutrients and vitamins from nutrient-dense fruits, vegetables and protein sources." He pointed out that "hidden hunger"

due to malnutrition and insufficient micronutrients is a significant global problem, leading to issues such as obesity, stunted growth and cognitive impairment.

"Nutritious food should be a universal right," said Davies. He pointed out that one-third of the world's food is wasted, enough to feed about 2 billion people. "We're super spoiled," he said. "We want to have that unblemished fruit, that unblemished vegetable, that perfect shape, which we call No. 1. If it doesn't make that No. 1 standard, a lot of times it just gets chucked."

Davies stressed the importance of "sustainable intensification" — doing more with less. This approach involves finding innovative ways to increase food production while minimizing environmental impact. "We have the ability to do this. It's not simple, but there are real opportunities," he said.

Climate change, population growth and deforestation are significant challenges Davies identified in the quest for global



food security. However, he remains optimistic about the future, citing technological advancements and innovative approaches like vertical farming, controlled environment agriculture, and even the potential of insect protein.

Davies' passion for his work is palpable, and his optimism is infectious. "We can live in a dystopian world of winners and losers

— or we can live in a world of abundance of water, energy, food — if we have the political will and smart and sustainable policies in place," he stated.

"There is a food revolution going on," Davies concluded. "People are interested in eating healthier, tastier — trying new food and recipes. What a great time for producers, chefs, restaurateurs and food delivery!"

ALOHA SPIRIT: RESTAURATEUR'S JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE AND COMMUNITY

JIM ANDERSON '75



For Jim Anderson '75, owning Dollies Pub & Cafe in Maui is about more than running a business — it's about fostering a sense of community. When Anderson became the seventh owner of the once-struggling restaurant, he transformed Dollies into a thriving local favorite. "I was the seventh owner but the longest and most successful one," he said.



“It will take 10-15 years to rebuild one of the most beautiful places in the world.”

Anderson's journey to Maui's food scene was anything but straightforward. After graduating from the University of Florida as a four-time All-American swimmer, he ventured into the food and beverage industry as a bartender. His career took him across the globe, leading him to top roles in major hospitality brands like Planet Hollywood and Rainforest Cafe. But it was a call from an old boss that lured him to Hawaii, where he became the Food & Beverage Director at the Ilikai Hotel.

In 2010, Anderson acquired Dollies, paying tribute to its namesake — a dog named Dollie — by naming his own Labrador after the pub's mascot. Under his leadership, Dollies became known for its award-winning pizza, even earning the

Ai'pono Award for the best pizza on Maui.

Expanding his culinary reach, Anderson opened Beach House Bar & Grill at the Sands of Kahana resort and established a second Dollies location on Maui's Northshore.

In August 2023, when wildfires devastated Lahaina, Anderson's restaurants were spared, but he witnessed the destruction of over 1,000 homes, 100 businesses, and the heartbreaking loss of life. In response, Anderson and his team donated \$40,000 in food and supplies and provided free breakfast and dinner to the West Maui community for ten days. "Things are still very sad in Maui, and it will never be the same," he said. "It will take 10-15 years to rebuild one of the most beautiful places in the world."

Anderson named his yellow Labrador "Dollie," after the restaurant's namesake. The original owner named the restaurant "Dollies" after his dog more than 40 years ago.

As Anderson plans for semi-retirement on the mainland next year, he remains committed to hospitality. "The most important thing is to get to know your guests," he emphasized, "and I pride myself on manager table visits. That visit makes a difference."



LEADING INNOVATION IN MEAL DELIVERY AT HELLOFRESH

LAURA LOUGHRAN '10



Laura Loughran '10 serves as the general manager of new ventures at HelloFresh, where she drives the growth of the company's diverse portfolio. This includes meal kits, ready-to-eat meals, seafood and meat delivery, premium pet food, and most recently, supplements, which were introduced in September. Loughran's role encompasses marketing, product development, and brand strategy, with oversight of brands like Factor, known for its dietitian-approved, health-conscious meal service. "At HelloFresh, the general manager role is like being the CEO of your brand," Loughran explained. "I'm responsible for the financial success of the brand and everything that goes along with it."

Loughran's transition to HelloFresh followed a career in tech, including positions at IBM and various startups. A positive experience shared by a friend at HelloFresh sparked her interest and led her to the company.

“We’re trying to do what we can to meet people where they are at in terms of how much time they have to cook or consume food.”

Her commitment to improving food options for busy lives drives Loughran's work. "We're trying to do what we can to meet people where they are at in terms of how much time they have to cook or consume food. What mechanisms, what innovations can we use to help them with that time saving, but not at the cost of sacrificing the quality or the nutrition of the food that they eat? I see a lot of opportunity in that space moving forward."

Reflecting on her Peddie days, Loughran credited her experience as a varsity swimmer for refining her time management and prioritization skills. She fondly remembers Pierogi Day and ziti pizza at Mannino's, joking, "When you're 16 and swimming a lot, you can eat things like that."

The Mai brothers have distilled their love for coffee and design into a thriving business.

In 2015, Robert Mai '08 and Charles Mai '11 co-founded Ovalware, a Los Angeles-based company known for its elegantly designed, functional coffee brewing equipment. Their mission: to enrich the daily coffee ritual for home brewers who appreciate both craftsmanship and the sensory

elements of a perfect cup.

While Charles spoke for this interview, the company is very much a collaborative effort. "Our journey with Ovalware began from a shared passion for design,

and coffee quickly became the medium through which our passion grew," Charles said.

Ovalware's specialty lies in premium brewing products, with their Cold Brew Maker emerging as a bestseller. The company distinguishes itself through sleek, minimalist designs that elevate the art of homebrewing. Recent innovations include stainless steel filters to reduce paper waste, part of a broader sustainability initiative that includes a transition to zero-plastic packaging.

BREWING A BETTER FUTURE:

THE MAI BROTHERS' COFFEE JOURNEY

“The creative experiences at Peddie significantly shaped my approach to entrepreneurship.”

Charles attributes much of his entrepreneurial spirit to his time at Peddie, particularly the creativity he explored in Andrew Harrison's art classes. "The creative experiences at Peddie significantly shaped my approach to entrepreneurship. Just as creativity knows no boundaries, being an entrepreneur is about pushing beyond what you already know and venturing into the unknown. I frequently ask myself, 'What if we tried this instead? What if we combined these elements?' It's this ongoing process of testing and trial and error that defines the entrepreneurial spirit."

With their commitment to sustainability and focus on enhancing the coffee experience, the Mai brothers are brewing more than just coffee – they're crafting a better future, one cup at a time.



Whether you're picking up a sandwich at Wawa or buying a bagged salad at Wegmans, there's a good chance Michele Williams '90 played a role in making it happen.

At Taylor Farms, one of the largest producers of ready-to-eat salads and fresh foods in the U.S., Williams ensures that healthy, convenient meals and fresh produce are available at grocery chains, restaurants and convenience stores nationwide.

Williams works closely with retailers to drive innovation under the Taylor Farms brand and for the retailers' private labels, helping the company thrive in three key areas: food service, retail and convenience. "If you buy a Taco Bell taco, that shredded lettuce is made by us," she



FRESH VISIONARY: HOW THIS PEDDIE ALUMNA IS KEEPING THE SALAD INDUSTRY CRISP

MICHELE CONKLIN WILLIAMS '90

explained. "And if you grab a sandwich for lunch at Wawa, that lettuce, along with all those snacks and fruit and grab-and-go, Taylor Farms does all of that product." The company also supplies fresh foods to restaurant chains like Olive Garden and to major retailers like Starbucks, Walmart, Trader Joe's and Wegmans.

Managing the complexities of fresh produce is no small feat. "We're developing an infrastructure to get to every major retailer quickly with the freshest product," Williams said. "With products that have a shelf life of seven days or less, it's not like selling a box of cereal."

Williams' passion for the food industry began when she worked in her family's restaurants along the Jersey Shore. This early experience, coupled with a degree in food marketing from the Rochester Institute of Technology, set the foundation for her successful career.

Beyond her work at Taylor Farms, Williams is a managing member of St. Pete's Brewing Company in Florida, where her husband, Tom Williams '90, serves as president and CEO.

Looking ahead, Williams is enthusiastic about emerging trends like hyperlocal sourcing, hydroponics and sustainable packaging. In an industry constantly evolving, she continues to lead with innovation, helping shape the future of fresh food.

UNCORKING SUCCESS AT MICHELIN-STARRED MUSKET ROOM

STELLA
MARTINDALE '16

Stella Martindale '16 has found her stride as the wine director at New York City's Michelin-starred Musket Room, where her role encompasses far more than recommending the perfect pairing. As she puts it, she manages "all things wine," from selecting and purchasing to storage and staff education.

Martindale discovered her love for the wine industry in college. After gaining hands-on experience in wine production and retail, she found her niche in the restaurant world.

"I really fell in love with restaurants when I realized the impact I have on the biggest moments in people's lives," she said.

"I have gotten to be a part of some truly amazing moments, including graduations, engagements and birthdays."

Despite her success, Martindale hasn't been immune to the challenges women face in the wine industry. "I still get remarks about how people are so shocked I am a female sommelier," she revealed. "I also find that staff are more likely to try and correct me than my male colleagues." However, at Musket Room, with its all-female ownership and management team, Martindale has found an environment where inclusivity thrives. "I think the type of people you work for really resonates even down to the type of guests you have walking through the door," she said.

When curating Musket Room's wine list, Martindale focuses on farmers who are passionate about their craft. She aims to create a diverse, globally representative selection that highlights the best of each region while delivering good value.

For those considering a career in food and beverage, Martindale's advice is straightforward: Start at the bottom.

"I have worked every hourly front-of-the-house job

"I really fell in love with restaurants when I realized the impact I have on the biggest moments in people's lives."

in a restaurant," she said. "I think because I have done this, I have a better understanding of how restaurants work and more respect for how the entire system works together."

To aspiring sommeliers, Martindale encourages persistence: "Keep going," she urged. "Guests can be mean, and days can be hard. I have had days when I leave in tears, convinced I know nothing about wine. I still show up the next day and talk about and serve wine."



REVOLUTIONIZING TODDLER NUTRITION WITH PEDIAGROW

ZAC OMAR '21



Zac Omar '21 is making waves in child nutrition with his company, PediaGrow, which will soon be available in baby store giant Buy Buy Baby. After two years at George Washington University, Omar made a bold decision to leave school and dedicate himself fully to creating a better nutritional alternative for toddlers. PediaGrow offers a clean, nutrient-packed formula crafted from grass-fed, French-made milk and has earned endorsements from leading pediatricians across the U.S.

The idea for PediaGrow was born in the summer of 2022, during the infant formula shortage that shook the United States. Moved by the crisis, and inspired by research he had begun for an entrepreneurship class, Omar immersed himself in FDA guidelines, market analysis and scientific data. His growing passion for the project led to a pivotal decision: leaving college to pursue his vision full-time. “There wasn’t an ounce of anxiety,” he said. “It was pure passion and excitement. I knew I could do really meaningful work. I was excited about it.”

PediaGrow’s toddler formula, designed for children 12 months and older, addresses the nutritional needs of early childhood, particularly for those struggling with the transition to solid foods. The company’s commitment to quality sets it apart — no corn

syrup or unnecessary additives. From sourcing milk from farms in Normandy to ensuring rigorous safety standards, Omar’s attention to detail is firm. “Quality and safety is where we start. It’s got to be number one,” he emphasized.

Omar credits Peddie for nurturing his self-reliance, which has fueled his entrepreneurial journey. “I left there a lot more independent and confident in what I could do,” he reflected.

Looking ahead, Omar is preparing to launch an infant formula by the end of 2024 and is in talks with other major retailers. His advice for aspiring entrepreneurs? “Just read everything. The more prepared you can be, the more confident you’ll feel in every situation.”