

# RIVER FALLS JOURNAL

Your online connection to River Falls, Wisconsin



Myron Mortell of rural River Falls owns and operates ThymeWORKS, a personal chef service in the St. Croix Valley. Vera Roy-Stoeberl photo

## Personal chef works magic in local kitchens

Friday, October 21, 2005

By Vera Roy-Stoeberl, Reporter, [vroy@rivertowns.net](mailto:vroy@rivertowns.net)

Myron Mortell used to be a carpenter of sorts, using his hands to design and build theatrical sets – creating imaginative backdrops that would complement performances of talented actors in the Twin Cities.

Now he uses those skillful hands to create delicious meals, mixed with that same imaginative flair, in area kitchens.

Mortell is the owner of ThymeWORKS, what he calls a personal chef service.

As a personal chef who has trained in the Twin Cities' Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Program, he presents "delicious and wholesome meals professionally prepared for you to savor in the comfort of your own home," says the rural River Falls resident.

He is also a certified food manager through Wisconsin's Department of Health and Family Services.

One could ask, who needs the services of a personal chef? Mortell has the answer:

- Busy families who want to eat better and together at home
- Working couples hungry for more quality time in their hectic lives
- Singles who aren't inclined to cook for themselves
- Persons on newly prescribed diets or healthy eating plans
- Convalescents
- Single parent families
- A friend or relative who may no longer shop and cook for themselves

- New parents or new homeowners
- Persons who are planning small private gatherings
- Groups or individuals interested in taking a cooking class

And how is a personal chef different from a caterer?

Mortell says most caterers prepare meals in a commercial kitchen facility and deliver them to their clients. But, a personal chef prepares meals in their clients' homes, can serve the meals if requested, and then does all the clean up work.

"I fill a niche that caterers aren't interested in," says Mortell.

He's also to be considered different than a private chef, who cooks for one person, one family or one group on a continuous basis.

A personal chef cooks for one or more people when needed.

## **Beginnings**

Mortell, who was raised in Sauk Centre, Minn., majored in theater at St. Cloud State University. His theatrical career began with him working various community theaters, and, as time passed, that career gravitated more towards the technical aspects of theatrical productions.

He served as the technical director of the Minnesota Children's Theater during much of the 1980s, with one of his sets even making the front cover of the Smithsonian magazine.

He also worked with Minnesota Public Radio at what is now the Fitzgerald Theater and toured with Garrison Keillor's "Prairie Home Companion" show.

In 1988 he designed the sets for the Democratic presidential candidates' debate that included Michael Dukakis.

Other highlights of Mortell's theatrical career included Dayton's department store's animated holiday displays and work on the Twin Cities' Holly Dazzle parade floats.

During the 1990s Mortell found himself working fulltime for trade shows, which is what he continued doing until he began ThymeWORKS early this year.

"Everything changed with 9/11," said Mortell about the reason he left the set design/construction field. "Business travel just died," he added, noting the affect the terrorist attacks had on the way businesses made themselves known across the country.

"I thought it might be time to start thinking about a 'Plan B,'" said Mortell in regards to his future. And that's how ThymeWORKS was created.

## **Learning a new trade**

"I've always liked to cook," says Mortell. But, he said, "When I was a young boy, boys weren't always welcomed in the kitchen."

That rejection didn't stifle his ambition to learn more about the craft. He enrolled at Le Cordon Bleu which he described as "just a wonderful experience."

The decision to become a personal chef came after he "found a world (he) didn't know existed" on the Internet, he said. There he learned the services of personal chefs were becoming more and more popular with the increase of hectic family lifestyles.

“I knew I didn’t want to cook in a restaurant,” Mortell said. “I wanted to do this alone and be off on my own.

“Now I can cook for one person or one family a day. They become my focus for that day and it’s something I find so appealing.”

## **Offerings**

Mortell says he’s skilled and has the knowledge to create a variety of culinary delights.

“I can prepare ethnic foods, vegetarian, organic – the whole spectrum – and it’s not just gourmet foods, but comfort foods as well. We can’t eat gourmet foods all the time,” he said. “Sometimes people just want a great meat loaf every once in a while.”

Mortell listed his “menu” of services:

- In-home meal preparation customized to perfectly match needs, schedules and tastes
- Help with special diet concerns
- Cocktail parties, dinner parties for friends or for businesses where he can serve full course meals individually or buffet style, or a variety of appetizers
- Special occasions like birthdays, wedding rehearsal dinners, graduations, anniversaries, baby showers, Valentine’s Day, dinners for two, holiday meals and more
- Private and small group cooking classes
- Menu Planning and consultation
- Gift certificates for any of his services

Living about eight miles south of River Falls with his wife of 20 years, Sandy Tauferner, Mortell will travel to his clients’ homes that are located throughout the St. Croix Valley and surrounding areas in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

He’s available to prepare meals almost around the clock: breakfast, brunch, lunch, afternoon teas, or dinners in formal or informal settings.

He does the planning, shopping, cooking and cleaning up so his clients can use their time and energy for other needs.

## **Where to start**

Mortell always begins by meeting his clients in their homes, which is a free initial consultation. There he gets a feel of his clients’ likes and needs and makes sure they have a “workable kitchen.”

“I have (and use) many of my own pots and pans” and other equipment, said Mortell, but has to know that clients’ major appliances will work for the type of meals they want him to prepare.

He’ll then talk about menu selection and offer suggestions if it’s requested.

“For example,” he said, “I had a client that didn’t know exactly what they wanted to serve, but knew they wanted some kind of wild game. So I suggested duck breasts and a wild rice pilaf.”

Mortell will help his client develop a personal menu.

His ThymeWORKS brochure lists a sample of his menu selections: White chicken chili, cranberry/orange pork tenderloin, crab cakes with red bell pepper sauce, black bean and goat cheese enchiladas, pecan-crusting salmon, classic pot roast of beef, or whatever his client wants and much more.

On the scheduled day, Mortell will shop for all ingredients needed for the meal he is to prepare. He'll fix the meal in the client's kitchen and serve it or package and label each item that can be stored in the refrigerator for use at a later time. He also includes "simple suggestions for heating and serving," he said.

Clients come home to find their kitchen all cleaned up with the delicious aroma of a home-cooked meal welcoming them.

Mortell says, "It's not the food. It's the service," that mostly appeals to his customers. "Some of my clients feel bad about not getting to make a decent and healthy meal for themselves or their loved ones." That's where he fits in.

At present Mortell has bi-weekly clients for whom he prepares a week's worth of suppers in one day. He has other clients that are scheduled on a monthly basis - business people who find a time each month when their work schedule doesn't allow cooking time.

Some just want the luxury of a home-cooked meal every so often.

Last weekend he spent two days preparing meals for a hunting party. And he's already getting calls about upcoming holiday parties.

To learn more about Mortell's ThymeWORKS personal chef service, call him at 273-7787 or 715-220-6056. His e-mail address is [thymeworks@presenter.com](mailto:thymeworks@presenter.com).

Information is also available at his Web site: [www.thyme-works.com](http://www.thyme-works.com).