

Pursuing a Dream

When it comes to seeking out opportunities to cook and compete, Jamie Keating is relentless in his quest.

By Kay Orde

Jamie Keating, CCC, first tried out for ACF Culinary Team USA a decade ago. "I didn't make the cut," he says, "but I continued to work hard and pursue my dream of becoming a member of this elite group of chefs."

Since college, Keating's goal had been to earn a place on the team, and he soon had an impressive number of competition medals to his credit.

In 2002, he tried out for the team again, and earned a place on ACF

Culinary Regional Team USA, which finished third overall in the world among 53 regional teams at the 2004 International Culinary Art Exhibition (IKA) in Erfurt, Germany. The following year, Keating was invited to compete with ACF Culinary National Team USA at the 2005 Salon Culinaire Mondial in Basel, Switzerland. The team earned gold medals in hot- and cold-food categories.

At the tryouts for the national team in 2006, Keating was in the lineup. This time, he reached his goal: a place on ACF Culinary National Team USA.

"Tenacious' is the best way to describe my drive for cooking," he says.

Meet Jamie Keating

Keating is chef/owner of Gourmet Events, a catering company at RiverMill Event Centre in Columbus, Ga. He grew up in New Jersey, and attended Paul Smith's College, Paul Smiths, N.Y. He apprenticed at L'Arpège, a Michelin 3-star restaurant in Paris, France, and attended Le Cordon Bleu School of Culinary Arts in Paris, and The Culinary Institute of America Greystone, St. Helena, Calif.

He has been married for 14 years to wife Melissa. The Keatings have four children: Christopher, 11, Nicholas, 9, Jack, 6, and Katie, 4. Keating says his family is his biggest ally in his commitment to Team USA.

"My family's support is wonderful," he says. "My boys are very competitive in everything they do, and always want me to follow suit. Melissa is my number-one



Play Ball

The love of food shared by Keating and his wife permeates their family. “We cook together as a family when I am home,” Keating says. “And spending time with my wife and kids is relaxing in itself.”

The Keatings also relax while enjoying a family pastime. They head to the ball park, where, Keating says, “We love to play baseball, and watch the kids play ball.”

“Our dream as a family, when time allows, is to visit each and every baseball stadium in the United States.”

fan and keeps the family organized when I am both at home and away. She runs the business and the family, and keeps both in ‘safe’ mode when I cannot be physically and mentally involved.”

Being a team member would not be an option without his wife’s continued support, Keating says, but fortunately, “She shares my love of and passion for food. The difference is, she likes to eat it, I love to cook it”

Support is vital in the months heading toward Team USA’s participation at the IKA in Erfurt, Germany, in October, as Keating orchestrates a delicate balancing act among his commitments to work, family and team.

“I use a ‘turn-the-page’ method. I would be lost without my Day-Timer,” he says.

“Between starting a new business—we opened the RiverMill Event Centre in August 2006—the team and keeping up with a large family, I must keep a calendar of events and have a set time for everything.”

Keating devotes one day a week completely to his family and their activities. “They understand the sacrifice and know that it is only temporary,” he says. “It is certainly a challenge to juggle all three—business, family and team—but I love a challenge.”

In the (team) kitchen

That challenge includes finding the all-important time in a busy schedule to devote to team practices and team projects outside official practice times. Keating is used to schedules; his business depends on adhering to a strict one. So, fitting in Team USA work is a matter of treating his team responsibilities in the same way that he runs his business.

“I devote Mondays completely to team work. It’s the slowest day of the week for me,” he says. “Normally, the rest of the week is divided up between business and team. In the evenings, I do a lot of research on the Internet.”

Keating came up with an innovative way to slot his team projects into a busy schedule without spending time away from home.

Smoked rabbit finger food with lingonberries.

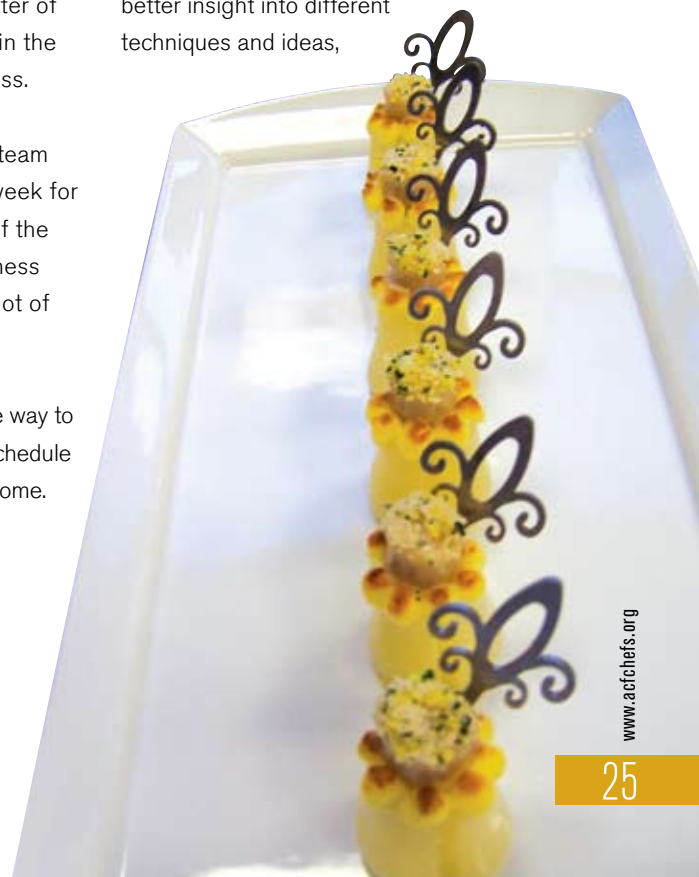
When he and Melissa built a house in 2004, it included two kitchens. One, in the basement, is Keating’s team kitchen.

“I have all the equipment I need, so when I am home, I can still be around my family and practice my concepts,” Keating says. “Not a minute goes by that I’m not thinking of a better way to do something, or coming up with a different idea.”

Team advantage

“Better” and “different” say a lot about the mindset of chefs on the level of ACF Culinary National Team USA leading up to the IKA. But the energy he devotes to team projects is paid back many times over in the advantages he has gained from being on the team, Keating says.

“Being able to surround myself with the talented chefs on the team gives me better insight into different techniques and ideas,



and a priceless knowledge that you are not going to find in any book," he says. "Also, the team has allowed me to travel all over the world and given me the opportunity to experience all types of cuisine.

"So when I'm doing private dinners or special events, I try to incorporate team concepts into the meal. It is definitely a challenge to pull off and also be able to relate to each and every palate."

But all the effort, when weighed against the benefits of being a Team USA member—knowledge, experience and pride—is worth it, Keating says. There's no doubt that chefs who compete internationally will gain vast amounts of knowledge and experience. But, pride?

"I am proud to represent the United States via the American Culinary Federation. It is an honor, and one that I have worked long and hard for," Keating says. "This organization has been good to me, and, education-wise, I have learned so much. I have met some wonderful chefs and mentors, and this is an experience I wouldn't trade for anything."

Raising the bar

Chefs who earn places on ACF Culinary National Team USA are undoubtedly talented, accomplished and possess a spark that makes them stand out from the crowd. Add to that a dogged determination to succeed and the willingness to put life on hold while they pursue gold medals and "best overall in the world" status at the IKA, and it's hard to imagine what more they can do to ensure an international win.

But Keating and his fellow team members know there's one more attribute they must possess to be champions: They must be motivated to raise the bar in cooking. "Being a member of Team USA is a privilege that is earned," Keating says. "The knowledge and information you walk away with that is gained through each and every chef involved is priceless.

"It challenges me to step it up a notch and continue refining my techniques and my cooking style, and pushes me to be the best chef I can be."

When it comes to outside support for the team, Keating, a strong believer in support at all levels, knows what he'd like to see. Whether chefs are involved in competition

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or not, he believes there's an opportunity for members of an organization such as the American Culinary Federation to offer support to each other.

"I think if we are members of the ACF organization, we should support each other no matter what we are a part of," he says. "I appreciate all that Team USA has done for me and done for the United States in the way of cooking. So the appreciation for something of this caliber, I believe, should lie within each and every chef who shares the passion of cooking."

Poached ruby trout with yellow beets and fava beans.

