

Food executive shows how to present attractive holiday foods

BY JOYCE BUPP
Staff Correspondent

HERSHEY — There are few times throughout the year when food takes on more prominent place in seasonal entertainment than during the Christmas holidays.

But, do you "serve" food to your holiday guests? Or do you "present" it?

Bill Trautman is a professional who practices creative art of foods presentation. Assistant general manager of food and beverages at the Hershey Convention Center, Trautman oversees all meal service responsibilities for convention events well as the Center's restaurants and lounges.

There are only 35 certified food and beverage executives in the country, and Trautman was one of the first to complete the year-long study course, which finishes with a four-hour proctored test.

Food has always been a vital part of Bill Trautman's life. Raised in Lebanon County, he became acquainted early with his grandfather's country butchering business.

"I grew up with country-butcher foods, and learned a love of that type food as a boy; plus, my grandmother was a wonderful cook," says the food executive.

His mother was employed in the

food industry all her life, working with the Verls Salads firm of Fredericksburg. It was there, at age 14, that Trautman landed his food-service job in the kitchens of this country salad and catering establishment.

Jobs at other food service businesses followed. Having started as a dishwasher, then progressing to grill work, and on up the ladder of food-service jobs, Trautman has truly learned his profession from the ground up. Prior to joining the Hershey Convention Center's staff 14 years ago, he was on the staff of the Hershey Country Club.

Trautman's philosophy has always been to focus food service specialties on locally available fresh items, and to be creative with it. An eight-week course of study, about a year ago at the Culinary Institute of America further reinforced his emphasis on local foods.

Considered by many experts as the top food school in the world, the Hyde Park, New York, Culinary Institute is actively promoting "American regional cookery," highlighting the meats, poultry, fish and fresh vegetables and fruits popular to the various geographical areas of the country.

To Trautman's surprise, the first recipe he was given to work with at the Institute was a Pennsylvania Dutch regional favorite—chicken corn soup.

But presentation, or the decorating of foods to please the eye as well as the palate, is a special love of Trautman's. With just a simple apple, orange, pineapple or pear, his professional creativity turns out a picture-perfect presentation worthy of cookbook-cover status.

Take plain canned pears, for instance. Many farm women have several quarts of these sitting on a basement shelf.

Don't just plop those pale pear halves in an everyday plastic dessert dish or saucer. Instead, add a bit of creme de menthe flavoring, available in the supermarket gourmet section, to the syrup that flavors the pear slices. If mint flavoring doesn't appeal to your tastes, green food coloring can lend the same effect.

Then, place the pear halves in stemmed glassware dessert dishes, dribble over a few spoonfuls of the pretty green syrup, and garnish with a stemmed maraschino cherry. You can't get much more holiday-looking - or simpler - than that.

Fresh pears are plentiful, too, and whole, poached ones also make a Trautman favorite. Peel around the sides, but leave a small "cap" of peel at the top around the stem. Core from the bottom, so



Hershey's food executive Bill Trautman skewers fresh, uncapped strawberries onto a pineapple for a finger-food buffet focal point.

that when the preparation is finished, the pear from the outside still appears whole, peeled, but stem attached.

Poach is a light syrup. For an attractive red coloring, add cinnamon candy hearts to dissolve in the syrup as it simmers with the pears, or a dash of amaretto flavoring, also found in market gourmet sections. Serve the pear, set upright, in a stemmed glass dessert dish, accented with the ruby-colored syrup.

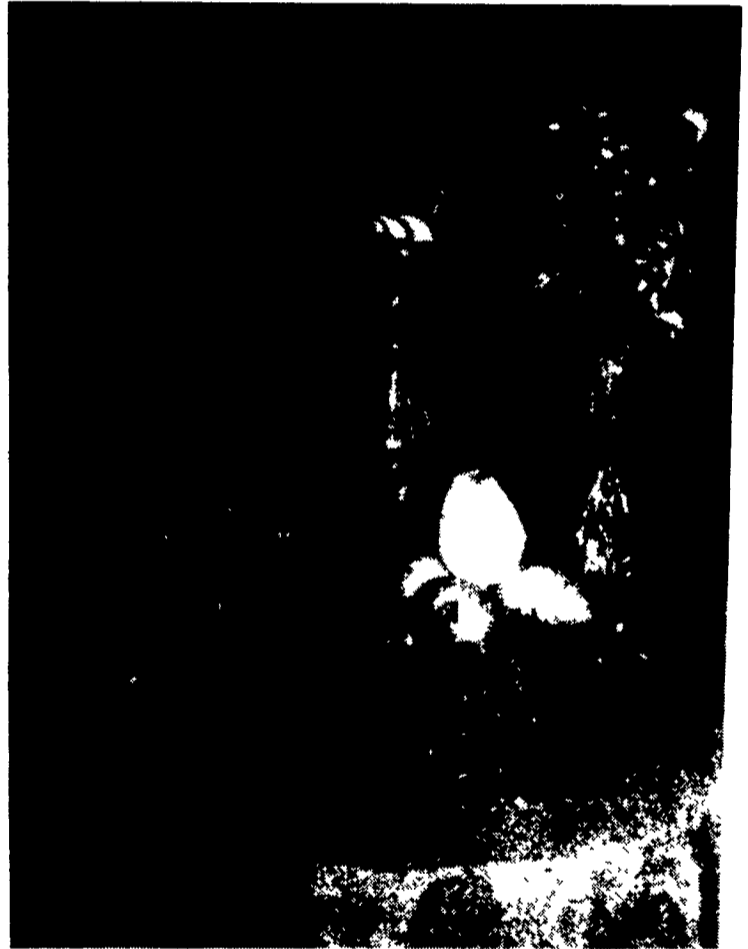
Pineapples have traditionally been symbols of hospitality and remain popular around the holiday season. For party nibblers, a pineapple can become part of the serving equipment, as well as an interesting buffet focal point.

Trautman selects an attractively-shaped, fresh, ripe pineapple, than studs it at intervals all around with sturdy, round toothpicks. Onto each toothpick goes a fresh, uncapped strawberry, which can then be removed for eating as a finger food, perhaps with a favorite dip. Other fruit, such as pineapple chunks, may be used as well.

Pineapple chunks also work well for party nibbling when served threaded on a toothpick, along with a chunk of boned, cooked ham. For an entree item, larger skewers allow for alternating several chunks of ham and pineapple.

Apples remain one of the most popular and readily available local fruits, and their cheerful colors are pleasing additions to holiday menus.

Trautman has devised a number



Simple foods take on a festive look with just a few creative touches: clockwise from lower left, canned pears in minty-green syrup; fresh strawberries skewered on pineapple; "Bird of Paradise" apple; a fresh, poached pear becomes party fare. Holly sprigs - or pyracantha with its bright berries - lend the perfect seasonal touch of greenery to foods and party tables.

of interesting and creative ways to incorporate apples into his presentations, including using the fruit as a condiment serving container.

He simply cuts off the top of an apple, then hollows out the center of the bottom part, saving the usable pulp for other recipes. The remaining cavity can be filled with a condiment such as mustard, or a dip for other foods, with the apple top serving as the cover until

needed. A green pepper, or even a cucumber, can be used in the same manner, and add eye-appealing color contrast.

Even a simple baked apple can become guest fare. Trautman likes to core and completely peel a whole apple for each serving, then put a blend of cinnamon, sugar, nutmeg and bit of butter in the apple. Apples are set in a baking pan, with a little water in the bottom, along with a bit of brandy

(Turn to Page B4)



The "Bird of Paradise" apple is created by making a series of V-shaped cuts into the top and sides of the fruit. Cut edges are dipped in lemon juice to keep from browning, then replaced at staggered intervals, sweeping backward, to form the look of wings and a tail. A head and neck piece is carved from a section of apple removed from the bottom to allow the bird to stand on a flat surface. Cloves stud the head for eyes.



Over lunch in one of the Convention Center's antique-decorated restaurants, Trautman confers with Hershey's food and beverage director James Schall.

Homestead Notes