

## Award 'tickles' chef

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**AUGUSTA** -- Where can you feast on award-winning, baked crusted haddock? Look no further than your own kitchen.

Personal chef Leah Peachey, of Augusta, recently was awarded Recipe of the Year by the United States Personal Chef Association for her baked crusted haddock. The award was given at the organization's annual conference.

Peachey, who has been cooking professionally for central Maine families for two-and-a-half years, said she was "tickled" at the honor.

"I've been making this recipe for about 20 years, and it was just a good feeling to be recognized," she said.

Peachey, who was raised in Massachusetts before moving to Maine in the late 1980s, grew up around cooking. She said she often took over the cooking duties if her mother was at work. Other members of the family also provided encouragement and inspiration. "My grandfather was an excellent cook," Peachey recalled. "I learned a lot from him." However, Peachey spent several years in the corporate world before deciding to pursue her dream of cooking.

"It just wasn't for me," she said of her office job at a construction company. "I wanted to do something I enjoy."

Peachey enrolled in the Culinary Institute of America's week-long "boot camp" in New York and then worked as a cooking intern at Wings Hill Inn Bed and Breakfast in Belgrade for a year under the tutelage of chef Christopher Anderson, a chef of 25 years who co-owns the inn with his wife, Tracey Anderson, a pastry chef.

"Leah has an excellent palate," Christopher Anderson said. "She is able to pick up on new flavors and be able to taste something and know what to add or what needs to be adjusted."

Anderson said he was pleased to hear of Peachey's recent award.

"It's good to see someone doing well and have it be someone I had a lot of involvement in," he said.

Peachey went into business for herself and opened Savory Selections Personal Chef Service in 2006, while still working at Wings Hill one day a week. She provides families with a week's worth of gourmet meals, all prepared from fresh ingredients and made in

the client's own kitchen. All meals can also be customized to a customer's dietary needs and preferences.

"Business has been going great," Peachey said. "It's a little overwhelming at times, but I think it's a good thing."

Peachey consults with clients first to determine their dietary needs, then purchases the food for her menu, focusing on fresh and healthful ingredients.

Erika Praul, of Windsor, has been a client of Peachey's since March of this year. The veterinarian and mother of three said in between her career -- which includes owning and running the Windsor Veterinary Clinic with husband, Darryl Praul, also a vet -- and spending every free moment she can with the couple's children, cooking is something that is put on the back burner sometimes.

"My children are 7, 6 and 4 years old," Erika Praul said. "My husband and I work all the time. We're pretty busy and this service is very convenient."

Peachey's business, Erika Praul said, was the perfect solution.

"People might see a personal chef as a luxury, but I don't," she said. "I see it as a practical convenience in our lives."

The Praul family is mostly vegetarian, though they eat "humanely raised" meat and fish. The special dietary requests have always been met by Peachey with no difficulty, Praul said.

"The food is delicious," she said. "My 7-year-old son raves about Leah's food." The family eats Peachey's meals one week a month, though Praul added she wouldn't mind having Peachey cook for them twice a month.

"It isn't just basic meals, it's gourmet food," Praul said. "It's healthy and it's all fresh. I would recommend her to anyone."

Peachey lives in Augusta with her husband and their three teenage children.

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