

Good & fresh

Fruit Smoothie goes down easy

BY DIANE GILES

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Today's cook: Abby Ventura, executive chef at Parkside Manor, an Alzheimer's disease/memory care assisted living facility in Kenosha

Today's dish: Fruit Smoothie

What makes it special: It's healthy, flavorful and goes down easy, which is exactly what the residents of Parkside Manor need.

"The residents really love (these smoothies) and they're a really healthy way to keep hydrated," said Ventura, of Kenosha.

This smoothie is made with all fresh fruit — nothing frozen — and uses 100 percent pure juice, not a watered-down fruit drink.

Ventura said that Parkside Manor, which currently has 25 residents, doesn't serve pre-made products containing salt, preservatives or breading.

As the top chef, Ventura creates menus that use whole grain products and no-sugar-added products, balancing nutrition and taste while using all-natural ingredients.

Soups, gravies and sauces all are made from scratch and without salt.

Ventura graciously offered her recipe for Airline Chicken Breast in addition to the Fruit Smoothie recipe.

"Normally I would add salt (to the Airline Chicken Breast recipe), but we don't use salt," Ventura said. "That's my biggest challenge because I love salt, but I'm not able to cook with it here."

Tip: When searing meat or poultry in a pan, don't be in a hurry to tear it out of the skillet.

"If you pick it up with the tongs and it's still sticking to the pan, that means it's not ready. It needs a little bit longer," Ventura said. "When it releases itself, it's ready."

A morsel about today's cook: Ventura is a 2006 graduate of the Cooking and Hospitality Institute of Chicago, and she has worked at a variety of restaurants in the Milwaukee and Chicago areas. Her job at Parkside Manor is her first executive chef position. She inherited her love of cooking from her mother, Kathleen Ventura, and her grandmother, Lillian Ventura.

"I was always in the kitchen when they were making their homemade pastas," Abby Ventura said. "I've always been close with my grandma. She had 10 kids, and so whenever she cooked, it was always to bring the family together. It was always this huge event. That's part of the reason I really love to cook, because I really admire my grandma, and she's one heck of a good cook."

Ventura's career path didn't start in the kitchen. She began her studies in psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, but then she discovered something else made her happier.

"I would come home and instead of doing my homework, I'd be making these eight-course meals," Ventura said. "I finally figured if this is what I'm happy doing, since I'm flunking psychology now, I should probably just spend the money and go to culinary school."

One last tidbit: When it comes to smoothies, variation is the spice of life. Use fruits based on personal preference or what is available seasonally.

At Parkside Manor, Ventura adds a little milk, yogurt or ice cream if the resident needs to gain or maintain weight.

Because of diabetic concerns of residents at the facility, Ventura said she shies away from using tropical fruits like pineapple when preparing smoothies at the facility.

"But if it was for me, I would go all tropical and some blueberry," Ventura said. "I love pineapple, mango and blueberries and would probably use cranberry juice."

"In the kitchen with..." features local people who enjoy cooking. Are you a weekend gourmet who would like to share a recipe with us? If you live or work in Kenosha County and are interested in appearing in this space, contact Features Editor Kathy Troher at 262-656-6363 or ktroher@kenoshanews.com.

IN THE KITCHEN WITH ...

ABBY VENTURA
OF PARKSIDE MANOR



Abby Ventura, executive chef at Parkside Manor, an Alzheimer's disease/memory care assisted living facility in Kenosha, is seen here with a Fruit Smoothie and Airline Chicken Breast served with broccoli, red potatoes and cornbread.

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FRUIT SMOOTHIE

- 1/2 cantaloupe, seeded and cut into chunks
- 1/2 honeydew melon, seeded and cut into chunks
- 6 strawberries with tops removed
- handful of blueberries
- 1 1/2 to 2 cups apple, cranberry or orange juice
- 1/2 cup milk, yogurt or scoop of ice cream, optional

Toss fruit in blender; add juice and dairy items (if used); liquefy until smooth. Serves three.

AIRLINE CHICKEN BREAST

- 4 chicken breasts with wing attached
- 3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 1/2 cups Dijon mustard
- 3/4 cup honey
- 1/4 teaspoon lime juice
- 1/4 teaspoon granulated garlic
- 1/4 teaspoon granulated onion
- pepper to taste
- 2 scallions, cut on a bias (slant), optional

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
Cut off each wing tip at first joint.
Heat olive oil in skillet just until it smokes. Pan sear each chicken breast, skin-side down. Do not try to remove from pan too soon; chicken will move easily when searing seals the meat.



Abby Ventura pours a Fruit Smoothie garnished with a lime wedge.

When breasts are seared golden brown (about 3 minutes), remove from skillet and place in roasting pan. Cook in oven for 15 minutes.

In a saucepan, combine and heat mustard, honey, lime juice, garlic, onion and pepper. Remove finished breasts from oven and spoon mustard sauce over them. Garnish with scallions for color and serve.