

Taking Advantage of A Down Economy to Achieve Your Goals: A Conversation with Paul Ingenito

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By: Erin Flaherty



They say when life hands you lemons, you should make lemonade, and Paul Ingenito, chef/owner of Flavors Catering, recently did just that when he purchased a permanent facility for his seven-year old catering company.

“Everything is relative,” he said. “When business is booming, everything is a little more expensive. When business is down a little, everyone one else is looking for work too.”

Ingenito took advantage of a soft economy to move his business out of the rented space they had been using, into a brand new, custom-designed 5,000 square foot kitchen. Having a permanent space not only allows Flavors Catering to continue catering everything from corporate events to weddings and anniversary parties, but Ingenito has also recently started giving cooking classes and demonstrations at night.

“Before it was strictly a commercial kitchen,” he said. “We’ve only had half a dozen classes, but the response has been outrageous. It started with people asking me about food. [At the end of the day] it seems like winding down, not a job.”

Ingenito is glad that he can pass on his love of food to new “foodies” in the Washington, DC area through these classes. For Ingenito, his love of food started when he was 15 on Long Island, thanks to his Italian family and work in neighborhood delis. What started out as an after school job turned into a career, after Ingenito graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in 1980. After three years of seasonal work at resorts in Florida and Cape Cod, Ingenito took a job at the prestigious restaurant Windows in the Washington, DC area. Three years later, he helped open Windows Catering and has been in the catering field ever since, including ten years as Executive Chef at The Mansion on O Street. Even after twenty-nine years in the business, Ingenito still loves to be hands on in his kitchen.

“Cooking is still the most fun for me,” he said. “The day I don’t [cook] is the day I have to get out of this business.”

With 25 to 50 events a week during his busy seasons, Ingenito has plenty to keep him busy in the kitchen and likes it that way.

“I have chefs that work for me, but I still run my daily operation,” he said. “That’s they only way you can keep yourself good.”

Keeping things new and exciting for his guests isn’t a challenge that Ingenito is afraid of. He knows that his business has been built on having loyal customers who keep coming back for his hands on approach to planning menus for events.

“You’ve got to be innovative – that’s what gets people to keep on coming back,” he said. “You’ve got to make suggestions to your clients to try some new things.”

The majority of Ingenito’s business during the week comes from the breakfasts, lunches and cocktail receptions he prepares for his corporate clients. On the weekend, his business is more focused on social events. He started to notice the effects of the economic downturn last summer, especially on the corporate side, but he thinks that business will be a little stronger this year.



“All of my corporate clients still do parties, but not as much as before,” he said. “Business doesn’t come to you – you’ve got to go out and find it.”

Ingenito doesn’t want to expand his business too much, though. He enjoys being able to have a personal interaction with each of his clients and be able to be hands on in the kitchen.

“You lose something when you get that big, no matter how good you are,” he said.

Aside from a little more expansion for his company, Ingenito hopes to bring his son, who is studying at the Culinary Institute of America, on board full time in the next few years. He is also focusing on his next major goals, since he recently fulfilled his goal of purchasing a facility for his company.

“If you don’t set goals in life you become very stagnant,” he said.

