

CUISINE WITH COMPASSION

*A K of C culinary team serves both parish and community
under the leadership of a renowned French chef*

by Jean Denton | photos by Doug Buerlein

A satisfied smile spread across Bob Rosbaugh's face as he watched a guest at this year's annual French Food Festival in Richmond, Va., lift a plate to his lips and savor every last drop of beef burgundy sauce.

"With French cooking, it's all about the sauces," said Rosbaugh. He had arrived at the festival kitchen at 4:30 that morning, April 25, to assist his friend and culinary mentor, Master Chef Paul Elbling. They were soon joined by three more assistants as they began the meticulous process of preparing five sauces for the day's event — 120 gallons in all, which would delight the palates of thousands of festival attendees who had come to sample the French fare of the internationally acclaimed "Chef Paul."

Rosbaugh and the other sous-chefs were part of Elbling's recently formed "culinary team," a group of fellow Knights from Msgr. Charles A. Kelly Jr. Council 14129 in Richmond who have been helping him serve fine cuisine for charity.

LEARNING HOW TO SERVE

The popular French Food Festival, now in its seventh year, is the main fundraiser for St. Joseph's Home for the Aged, which is administered by the Little Sisters of the Poor in Richmond. It was a natural outgrowth of a friendship between the sisters, whose order originated in France, and French-born Elbling, who has been a patron of their ministry to the elderly poor for more than 40 years.

Every spring, Richmond foodies flock to the festival on the wooded grounds of St. Joseph's Home. Strolling among brightly decorated, French-themed booths hosted by multiple local chefs, festivalgoers sample quiches, crepes, French bread and wine. Most come for love of the Little Sisters and the opportunity to taste Elbling's renowned cooking.

"They come to get Chef Paul's food, and we Knights of Columbus are going to make sure that happens," said Rosbaugh, an information technology professional who coordinates the culinary team.

Elbling's brother Knights from Council 14129 have volunteered to help run the French Food Festival since its beginning. But last year, Rosbaugh and several others wanted to do more to help

Elbling, 74, maintain the event's success.

Rosbaugh approached Elbling with the idea of forming a team of Knights to learn the finer art of cooking and to assist in preparing the food.

"I felt like we couldn't just have Chef Paul here and not learn from him," Rosbaugh explained, noting that Elbling is a culinary icon in Virginia and beyond.

Elbling, who strives to be "a good Catholic and a good American," was born in France's Alsace Province. He began his training as an apprentice at age 13 and earned a scholarship to Le Cordon Bleu Paris Culinary Arts School. He received his European Master Chef certification in Germany before coming with his wife, Marie-Antoinette, to the United States in 1967.





Above: Master Chef Paul Elbling is pictured with fellow culinary Knights from Msgr. Charles A. Kelly Jr. Council 14129 in Richmond, Va. Opposite page: A fresh serving of Coquille St. Jacques, prepared by the Knights, is pictured at this year's French Food Festival, a fundraiser for the Little Sisters of the Poor.

In 1976, about five years after Elbling moved to Richmond, he accepted an invitation from a good friend at St. Mary's Church to join the Knights of Columbus. "I loved it, and I still love it — it's a part of my life," he said.

Elbling's list of culinary accomplishments and awards is long, and he's served on the boards of several prestigious culinary schools. His rise to prominence, however, came largely from his 34 years as the executive chef and owner of Richmond's La Petite France restaurant, which he ran in full partnership with his wife.

"We did it together," Elbling said. "She ran the dining room while I ran the kitchen."

Since selling their restaurant and retiring in 2006, the couple has been involved in programs serving disabled children and the poor in Richmond, and they continue to support the Little Sisters.

When presented with the prospect of sharing his love of food and the culinary arts with his brother Knights, Elbling was delighted. He and Rosbaugh hand selected a team of 10 men, based on the varied gifts they would bring to the group. Their first year has proven to be not only an education, but also an experience of spiritual growth under the master chef's tutelage.

"I love it, and they enjoy so much the food and learning

how it is prepared and presented," Elbling said in his thick French accent.

That much was obvious at the most recent French Food Festival. One could easily identify culinary team members under Elbling's proud, watchful eye in the festival kitchen. They were the ones who gave extra attention to the food, who carefully ladled out the sauces and who correctly pronounced *bouchée à la reine*.

One team member, Jack Sheehan, joked that his abilities have risen "to where my wife now lets me cook at home," adding how grateful he is for Elbling's mentorship.

"Chef Paul is so great to work with," Sheehan said. "He loves what he's doing and never loses his cool. If you do something wrong, he'll just nudge you and say, 'Here, let me show you.' He's such a great teacher."

PRACTICING HOSPITALITY

Elbling's special relationship with the Little Sisters of the Poor began in 1975 when he and Marie-Antoinette arrived in Richmond and opened La Petite France. They became familiar with the sisters' work and saw their need.

"We could see they were in very bad financial shape," Elbling said, "so we decided we must do something special to help them."



Clockwise, from top: Kevin Ogborne assists Chef Paul in preparing a tray of Coulubioc de saumon au coulis de homard (filets of fresh salmon with spinach wrapped in puffed pastry crust and served with a lobster cream sauce). • Mike Morrissey (right) and his brother Knights serve festivalgoers. • Mother Marie Edwards (right), administrator of St. Joseph's Home for the Aged, is pictured at the festival with other Little Sisters of the Poor.



Months later, the Elblings hosted a black-tie dinner at their restaurant with the considerable proceeds going to the Little Sisters' ministry. They've continued to hold the gala every year since. Elbling estimates that the annual dinner and the French Food Festival have raised nearly \$5 million for the sisters over the past four decades.

"I love the Little Sisters," he said. "They work so hard. I feel it's my home. When I come here to visit and see the older people's smiles, it is the joy of my life."

The Little Sisters in Richmond care for about 100 residents and must raise 60 percent of St. Joseph Home's annual budget, said Mother Marie Edward, the facility's administrator. Elbling's events, she noted, contribute significant financial support and provide community awareness of the sisters' work.

"It's great PR," she said. "People come who say they've never heard of us even though we've been in Richmond for 140 years."

Elbling's culinary team shares his commitment to serving people in need in the community. Rosbaugh explained that while team members enjoy honing their fledgling culinary skills, their ultimate purpose is to glorify God through their service, while raising funds for charity.

In fact, before they even begin cooking, the Knights join in a prayer composed by team member Rich Gasperini, a local attorney, and conclude by invoking the intercession of St. Lawrence, patron of cooks, and St. Martha, patron of waitstaff.

Witnessing the development of the culinary team over the last year has been particularly meaningful for Father Michael Renninger, pastor of St. Mary's Church, where the council is based. Father Renninger said that the Elblings have imbued the Knights with a new "sense of hospitality" that has greatly enhanced other parish functions the team has begun hosting.

"They created events that were welcoming and gracious, and of course the food was superb," said Father Renninger.

The result is that attendance and participation at parish events have skyrocketed.

"These Knights from very different walks of life are coming together and feeding this parish constantly," Father Renninger said. "As a parish, we receive Christ at the table of the Eucharist. With the culinary team, we also experience God's goodness at their banquet tables throughout the year."

As its reputation has grown, the team has been invited to serve food at numerous events. At a council-sponsored blood drive, the team treated donors to made-to-order omelets. And at a pastor appreciation event last fall, the menu featured lobster soufflé and bison tenderloin.

"We present cuisine in a way not normally representative of Knights of Columbus events. Our forte is kicking it up a notch," explained Gasperini.

He admitted, however, that everyone in the group had plenty of experience with barbecues and fish fries.

Indeed, Rosbaugh, who is generally considered the most ardent culinary pupil among them, pointed out that this unique opportunity to develop new skills in cooking and hospitality has simply reinforced the team's primary purpose.

"It's all about service. It's about how we live the four principles of being a Knight," Rosbaugh said, noting that men have become "extremely close" through learning and working together.

"This is the way we serve — one another, our community and our Lord," he added. "It's what we are called to do."♦

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THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR AND THE HHS MANDATE

Threatened with crippling government fines, the sisters await the imminent ruling on their appeal

THE MISSION of the Little Sisters of the Poor, the religious order founded by St. Jeanne Jugan in France in 1839, is to provide "the neediest elderly of every race and religion a home where they will be welcomed as Christ." Today, the Little Sisters serve more than 13,000 elderly poor persons in 31 countries, embodying Christ's call to care for "least of these."

In the United States, where the sisters operate more than 30 homes, the Little Sisters' mission has been at risk as a result of the Department of Health and Human Services' contraception mandate, which is part of the Affordable Care Act. Because of their refusal to provide their employees with insurance plans that cover abortifacient drugs, contraception and sterilization, the Little Sisters have been threatened by the U.S. government with millions of dollars in annual fines.

In September 2013, the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty

filed a lawsuit on behalf of the Little Sisters challenging the federal mandate. Since then, the Supreme Court has intervened twice in the case — first in the final hours of 2013, when Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor issued a temporary order preventing enforcement of the mandate against the sisters, which was due to begin Jan. 1, 2014, and again in January 2014 when the entire Court intervened to prevent enforcement of the mandate until the federal courts resolved the sisters' appeal.

On the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Dec. 8, 2014, the Little Sisters of the Poor had their day in the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals, one step below the Supreme Court. The Tenth Circuit is expected to reach a decision on the appeal, titled *Little Sisters of the Poor v. Burwell*, in the coming weeks. — *Reported by Scott Lloyd*