



PROFILE

KITCHEN CHICKS CATERING

Kennebunkport, ME
 www.kitchenchicks.com

- Off-premise catering with an on-premise retail store
- \$1 million annual sales, 60% in catering

Seasonal clientele bring golden eggs

In 2001, Peggy Liversidge had just started her catering company by taking over a job from a local caterer who couldn't do an event. Minutes into this new career, a friend noticed that Liversidge needed a name for the company. The guests at this very first event would be high-end, and Liversidge needed to be able to market to them.



chef, Chris Johnson, is bringing in new flavors as well, including some Asian fusion dishes; the Thai-influenced coconut and green curry chicken appetizer has become a new favorite.

"I said, 'I don't know, I'm just a chick in the kitchen,'" says Liversidge. Her friend took that idea and came back with business cards. "So we're called Kitchen Chicks Catering."

Today, Kitchen Chicks operates an upscale retail store and a catering company that specializes in high-end social and corporate events. The store is modeled after a European deli, with specialties like lobster pot pie, crab cakes and meatloaf. The catering company boasts similar fare, including locally sourced items and regional food. "The fresh local seafood—lobster, shrimp, crab—is what people want when they're doing events in Maine," says Liversidge. The company also prepares a lot of surf-and-turf and has created an upscale, elegant version of a lobster bake, a popular choice for events. The bake includes an outdoor presentation cooking of lobsters. "It's definitely a Maine thing," says Liversidge. The company's executive

MARKET

Located just 30 miles southwest of Portland, ME, Kennebunkport only has 3,700 residents in the winter, but the town swells to upwards of 45,000 in the



summer with vacationers, retirees, daytrippers and those with second homes. Most of the market is high-end, with lavish parties, in-home events and galas.

The area is also a well-known vacation spot for politicians, including the Bush family. Kitchen Chicks has catered one Bush event, a bridal luncheon hosted by First Lady Laura Bush for a Bush cousin; the menu was a simple lobster and avocado salad.

The market swells during the winter holidays with Kennebunkport's popular Christmas festival and vacationers spending the holidays at their second homes. Destination weddings are popular, too. Much of Kitchen Chicks' core business is seasonal, beginning in April and ending in October (the exception being the holidays); the company takes January, February and March off.

Kitchen Chicks competes with a small handful of local caterers, but its major competition comes from Boston, southern New Hampshire and Portland, ME. Liversidge is also expanding her market to include the Portland area, particularly for business and corporate events.

STAFF

Liversidge employs 48 people during the peak season and 10 during the off season,

most of them working part-time for events. She pays all wait staff \$20 an hour, a figure that's generous but a good business decision in her mind. "The staff comes back year after year, they love their jobs, they're getting paid good money and they get treated well," says Liversidge.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

Liversidge recently invested in a new, larger kitchen for the catering company. "It's a huge challenge, as that kitchen is going to have to pay for itself," says Liversidge, "We're not going to be able to close in January, February and March anymore. We're going to have to dig up some business during those months."

INTERESTING TRENDS

Kitchen Chicks has started to take on more of the wedding planning for destination brides, including finding florists, music, decorations, etc. The trend is a double-edged sword for Liversidge. "Sure, we can upcharge and make more money. But it's tremendous pressure on me and my staff," she says.

Liversidge is encouraging her clients to move away from traditional presentations of some of their favorite surf-and-turf entrees: serving the lobster as an elegant appetizer, for example. She says she is seeing more buffet dinners at weddings, replacing served meals. 