

Business

Chef service in demand for real estate closing gifts

■ New home buyers get house and a meal

By Joyce Owen

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What might seem to be a luxury, the services of a personal chef, is an alternative some Realtors are providing as a closing gift to celebrate the purchase of a client's new home.

"I had a big closing and thought a Table Five gift certificate was a unique, out-of-the-box gift," ResortQuest Realtor Kevin Kramer said.

Table Five's owner Chef Phil McDonald specializes in dinner parties and private home events along the Emerald Coast.

In the past, Kramer took clients to dinner or sent flowers or a basket of wine and cheese as a gift, but his strategy has changed with the success of this program.

"The cost of a dinner, with a bottle of wine and gratuity is comparable to the cost of the chef service," he said. "I think this is a lot better. It's more memorable."

"I have purchased Chef Phil's services for numerous clients and each time I receive an e-mail or phone call from my client thanking me for the amazing dining experience. Table Five leaves a lasting impression with my clients so I know they will never forget me or Chef Phil," he said.

"Many clients have done repeat business with Table Five, and every time he shows, they remember me, too," Kramer said.

"In recent months, we have received a substantial amount of business from local Realtors contacting us to purchase our services for new home buyers," Phil McDonald said. "Given the current real estate market, Realtors are seeking creative ways to set themselves apart from the crowd and express their sincere appreciation to home buyers."

"Some of our best clients are doing really well in Panama City Beach," Table Five managing partner Madra Medina McDonald said. "We anticipated this month being slow, but there have been more closings and Realtors are purchasing gift certificates," she said.

Chef Phil can provide dinners for two, family-style meals and cooking classes for the aspiring gourmet cook. The Table Five experience includes a personal consultation with the home buyer, customized menu, wine pairing, grocery shopping, travel, food preparation, cooking, serving and kitchen clean-up.

Although a gift certificate from a Realtor might provide dinner for two, often when the recipients review the options, they decide to pay extra to have a family dinner party.

Some recipients opt for a formal dinner, but families often chose a casual dinner. The pizza party, where even the kids can come in the kitchen and watch while dinner is prepared, is popular, Madra said.

"People are generally not allowed in a restaur-



Chef Phil McDonald prepares dinner at a client's home. His company, Table Five, a personal chef service, has seen an increase in the purchase of gift certificates as Realtors seek unique closing gift for home buyers. (Submitted by Madra Medina McDonald/Photo by Michael Belk)

rant kitchen," she said. "This is more like a culinary demonstration, it's sort of like having the Food Network in your own house," Madra said. Table Five services include a personal chef for a year.

Although no one has purchased it yet, Madra said with the number of high-end homes in this area, it's an option someone might consider. "It's like any type of concierge service - a small luxury - that I

would think is a nice perk for a new homeowner," she said.

For more information, contact Chef Phillip McDonald at (850) 496-5066 or visit online at www.TableFiveChef.com.

St. Joe to sell 100,000 acres in northwest Florida

The St. Joe Company launched the sale of 100,000 rural land acres under its "New Ruralism" portfolio of residential real estate offerings.

Divided into more than 220 property listings, Joe's rural land ranges from 1,000 sellable acres, including high end private retreats, home sites, ranches, farmsteads, hunting plantations, waterfront lots and woodland preserves.

Each rural land property offers easy access to regional amenities, including beaches, championship golf courses, state and national forests, fresh and saltwater fishing, boating, hiking and wilderness getaways.

"The primary reason for purchasing a rural land parcel is to build a residence with plenty of property left for conservation and recreation," said Clay Smallwood,

president, Timberland and Rural Land Sales for Joe.

He added many potential landowners are considering northwest Florida as an alternative to congested, overdeveloped South Florida.

The offerings include:

-- Blue Creek Forest, Liberty County. Land tracts range from 26 to 372 acres, located 50 miles to the Gulf Coast, 30 miles to Tallahassee, and close to public boat landings;

-- Wiregrass Preserves on the Chipola, Calhoun County. Four large preserves range from 77 to 150 acres on the banks of the Chipola River.

-- Landings at Wetappo Creek, Gulf County. Lots range from three to six acres with deep water access, approximately 8.5 miles to the Gulf coast via Intracoastal Highway.

Parcels are restricted. Homes built must be at least 2,000 square feet

and only one home per 20 to 40 acres may be developed.

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