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## GASTRONOMIC GETAWAY

*Cooking Show Offers Associate an Office Outlet*

by MARY ALICE ROBBINS



cutline

**H**aving spent the previous day taking a deposition in Dallas, Marie Hejl, a 27-year-old associate with Locke Liddell & Sapp in Austin, found herself too pressed for time on Dec. 17 to look for a recipe for wasabi dipping sauce.

While that probably wouldn't have been a problem for most people, Hejl needed to know how to make the sauce for the salmon cakes she was preparing with Andy Brown, an associate with DLA Piper Rudnick Gray Cary in Austin, for the filming of an upcoming episode of Hejl's cooking show.

"So Andy and I just winged it — throwing in some sour cream, light mayonnaise, minced fresh parsley and wasabi [an Asian spice]," Hejl says of the Dec. 17 filming session. "Fortunately, it tasted fabulous."

Since December 2004, Hejl has hosted the weekly show, "It's Easier Than You Think," on PACT Channel 16, an Austin cable access television station. The approximately 30-minute show airs at 7 p.m. on Mondays.

"We encourage people to become heavily involved in and learn how to do TV as an art," says Garry Wilkison, PACT's general manager. "She's certainly one of brightest examples of that," Wilkison says of Hejl.

Hejl says the show now airs on access TV channels in 20 communities across the nation — from Rochester and Staten Island, N.Y., to Port Townsend, Wash. The only other Texas city where the show can be seen is Dallas, where it airs on DCTV.

"The great thing about the show, as opposed to the law, is it's low stakes; it doesn't matter if you

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# COOKING SHOW OFFERS AUSTIN ASSOCIATE AN OFFICE OUTLET

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mess up on a dish," says Hejl, who has a civil litigation practice at Locke Liddell.

As a litigator, she's often under pressure. Hejl says she is assisting in the defense of a radio station in a multimillion-dollar suit that involves conversion, misappropriation, tortious interference with a contract, trademark infringement and other claims. She says she also is assisting in the defense of a product manufacturer in the statewide silicosis litigation. She declines to name the clients in those cases.

The cooking show provides her with a creative outlet. Hejl says the purpose of the show is to demonstrate that cooking good food is not difficult. She says she came up with the idea to do the show after a friend requested her help in making pies.

After deciding to do a cooking show, Hejl says she posted a notice that she needed a producer on the request board at the access station. "I got one phone call," she says.

The caller was Emanuel Limuel Jr., assistant to the pastor at Mount Sinai Baptist Church in Austin, who agreed to work with Hejl. Limuel says he has been a producer on the Austin access station for about seven years and previously produced a food show on access TV in San Antonio.

Hejl says she became a member of PACT to do the show. She says that becoming a member entailed participating in two orientation courses — one on technology and production and the other on commercialism and obscenity laws.

To get a series spot on PACT, Hejl says she had to furnish the station with three episodes of her show within about three weeks' time. Hejl says she and Limuel did one episode in her parents' old home and two more in her apartment, but neither site worked well. "We've learned a lot since then," she adds.

Hejl's studio today is the kitchen of her parents' new

home in West Lakes Hills. A 13-by-5-foot island that covers much of the room serves as her set.

Limuel does most of the filming, although Whitney Bishop, another PACT member, assists by filming with a second camera when close-up shots are needed, Hejl says. The filming usually is done on Saturdays.

Doing the program is expensive. Hejl estimates that she spent about \$3,000 over the past year for food and the tapes that are used to record the show.

Hejl does most of the show off the cuff. "I usually plan out the introduction," she says. "The rest is completely unscripted."

However, she plans each episode of the show around a theme. For example, an upcoming show featuring Brown, a Democrat running for the District 48 seat in the Texas House, focuses on food to serve at a campaign party.

After approximately three hours of filming, Hejl and Brown had prepared jalapenos stuffed with sausage, cream cheese and Parmesan cheese, a vegetable tray with a hollowed-out purple cabbage in the center to hold a feta-cheese dressing and chocolate-covered strawberries. Brown assisted with each dish and told stories about funny things that have happened at campaign parties — including a story dating back to the 1976 Republican presidential primary when Gerald Ford bit

Underwood, another associate with Locke Liddell in Austin, met at the Capitol City Trap and Skeet Club for a morning of practice shooting at clay pigeons.

"Skeet shooting has been a hobby of mine since I was a senior in college," Hejl says, adding that she decided it would be interesting to include a lesson on skeet shooting as part of a show on cooking game.

Meisel, who appears with Hejl in the upcoming skeet shooting/wild game cooking episode, says he and Hejl have known each other since they both were students at the University of Texas School of Law. Hejl graduated from the law school in 2003, the year after Meisel graduated.

"We ran into each other at the [U.S.] Bankruptcy Court in Austin," Meisel says. "We started talking and she invited me to participate in the skeet shooting and cooking."

Meisel says he has been shooting skeet since he was a child and also has an interest in cooking. "I like to go to Central Market

on Sunday afternoons and cook dinner on Sunday night," he says.

Hejl says she and Meisel collaborated on the menu for the show, which features as the main course breast of duck with a ginger, port, ancho chili peppers and honey glaze.

"It looks a lot easier when you're watching it on TV than when you're behind the stove and in front of the camera," Meisel says of the cooking experience.

Meisel says he and Hejl used a food processor instead

**"It looks a lot easier when you're watching it on TV than when you're behind the stove and in front of the camera," Seth Meisel says of the cooking experience.**

PHOTO CREDIT

***"The great thing about the show, as opposed to the law, is it's low stakes; it doesn't matter if you mess up on a dish,"***

***Marie Hejl says.***

into a tamale still encased in its corn husk. Brown did not return a telephone call seeking comment before presstime on Dec. 22.

Hejl says she met Brown at a campaign event, and he expressed an interest in being a guest on the show. She usually chooses guests at random, contacting people whom she would like to have on the show.

Hejl says she also likes to include activities besides cooking on the show.

On a chilly morning in November, Hejl and two friends, Seth Meisel, an associate with Hughes & Luce in Austin, and Elissa

of a blender when they made the glaze and, because they had to film a number of takes, ended up cooking the glaze for the wrong amount of time. As a result, the glaze had more chunks in it than they had planned.

"Our glaze turned into more of a salsa," he says. "It turned out OK, a happy mistake, I guess."

Underwood participated only in the skeet shooting segment of Hejl's show. "I love her show and the whole idea behind it, and I thought it would be a cool thing to do," Underwood says.

Hejl says attorneys at Locke Liddell have encouraged her to do the cooking show, sometimes offering ideas on dishes she might cook.

Brad Hawley, managing partner of Locke Liddell's Austin office, says he had hoped to provide Hejl with pheasants he shot during a hunting trip with clients in South Dakota. But the pheasants arrived after the filming date, he says.

"Unfortunately, my pheasants didn't make it to the show," Hawley says. "I've asked her for a recipe [for cooking pheasant]."

Some of her guests have taught Hejl how to prepare

dishes. When Hejl did a show featuring traditional Spanish cuisine earlier this year, Brenda Santos, a family friend from Mexico, taught Hejl and her viewers how to make Caldo de Marisco, a seafood soup. "She explained everything in Spanish and I translated into English," Hejl says.

Hawley says Hejl started the cooking show on her own initiative but that Locke Liddell points out her endeavor to young lawyers it's trying to recruit as evidence that the firm encourages its attorneys to do things outside the office.

"It does demonstrate that some lawyers can have a life outside the office," Meisel says of Hejl's show.

### Entrepreneurial Streak

A self-taught cook, Hejl says she has been cooking for "as long as I can remember." She says she started cooking because her parents worked and she enjoyed trying new dishes. Her three brothers — Jim, now the director of technology development at Electronic Arts Sports; Chris, a junior at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill.; and Matt, a senior at West Lake High School — provided "willing stomachs" to test her culinary creations, she says.

She also remembers watching "The Frugal Gourmet," made famous by the late Jeff Smith, when she was a child, Hejl says.

When she was in the fourth grade, Hejl did three episodes of a cooking show for ACTV in Austin. Hejl says her brother, Jim, produced the show, "Kids Cooking."

"My brother was real involved in television and film, and we just decided to do it," she says.

"We did a breakfast show, a snacks show and a Halloween show," she recalls. "We had planned on doing more, but we ran out of money."

Hejl says she also opened a cake-decorating business, A Piece of Cake, in the summer of 1998 when she was an undergraduate at UT. But it takes so long to do a perfect cake that the business didn't make financial sense, she says.

During her second year in law school, Hejl started another business hand-painting exercise sandals, which

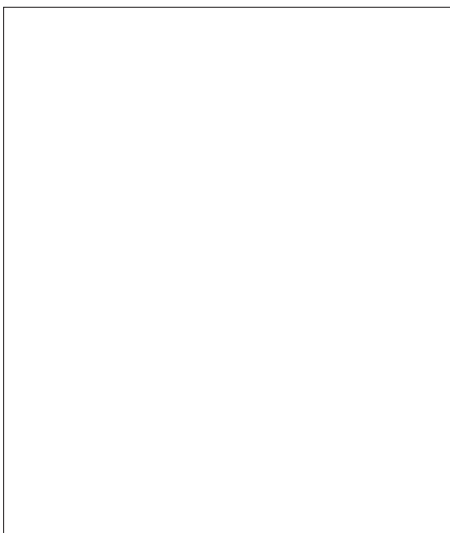


PHOTO CREDIT

**Brad Hawley (above) says Locke Liddell points out Marie Hejl's endeavor to young lawyers it's trying to recruit as evidence that the firm encourages its attorneys to do things outside the office.**

she sold on eBay for up to \$100. But while she made money by painting the sandals — customers could choose from a variety of prints, including the Texas flag — that business also didn't make sense from a financial standpoint, Hejl says. "I couldn't make more than five to 10 shoes a week," she says.

Hejl says the cooking show is the best endeavor she has tried, even though she and her producer do the work for free.

Limuel says it typically takes from two to three hours to film an episode of the show and another eight to 16 hours

to edit it. He can use PACT's equipment, although he does some of the work at home on his computer, Limuel says.

Hejl's contributions include planning the shows, inviting the guests, rounding up recipes and shopping for the food. A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin with a degree in marketing, Hejl also markets the show to other stations and seeks sponsors. Hejl says she usually e-mails stations and companies at night and tells them about her show.

Her sponsors, cookie maker Walkers Shortbread and bake ware manufacturer Le Creuset, provide in-kind support for the show, Hejl says. Walkers has provided her with cookies for use in preparing dishes, and Le Creuset furnished her with a set of bake ware.

Her legal experience has been helpful in making decisions about her cooking show, Hejl says. When a band she was negotiating with to provide music for the show wanted her to sign a contract, Hejl says she became wary. Hejl says she has represented small businesses that have encountered problems because they signed something too fast.

"I don't want to sign anything," she says. "I don't think I would be as cautious if I weren't a lawyer."

Hejl also says that managing her career as a lawyer with her activities as a cooking show host isn't that difficult.

In the show's first year, Hejl and Limuel worked on 15 episodes of the show. Hejl estimates that she spends about eight hours preparing for and filming an episode.

"I don't have kids, pets or a husband right now, so it is actually nice to have hobbies that I love and that are unrelated to work," she says. "Work takes priority over my hobbies, but I think that I am probably more effective at work because other areas of my life are so fun and fulfilling."

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