

Tarts and torts

Attorney shows that cooking up a little fun is easier than you think

ABOVE: Marie Hejl combines simple ingredients and easy recipes to make the art of preparing food a bit more fun and a good deal less daunting to the average person. **RIGHT:** Hejl gets a little tenderloin advice from Reese Ryan during a recent taping of her cooking show on location in West Lake Hills.



By Dane Anderson
Staff Writer

Marie Hejl has two loves. One is for the scales of justice, and the other is for the kitchen scale.

Charming and beautiful, she is a civil litigation associate at Locke, Liddell & Sapp. During the week, the Westlake High School graduate helps defend radio stations, school districts and product manufacturers using an arsenal of laws and torts. But, on weekends, Hejl is up to her elbows in wasabi sauce and cowgirl cookies.

"When I'm cooking or reading about cooking, I forget everything else that is going on in my life," she said. "I'm totally focused, but in a fun, creative, carefree kind of way. So I guess it is an outlet from the everyday stresses of life."

Hejl, 27, has her own cooking show, "It's Easier than You Think," which airs on Mondays locally at 7 p.m. on Austin Community Television cable channel 16. Austinites aren't alone in their admiration for Hejl's simple cooking philosophy. "It's Easier than You Think" broadcasts to 20 cities throughout the country, from Staten Island, N.Y., to Yreka, Calif. On her Web site, cookingwithmarie.com, Hejl shares cooking perspective and recipes from her show and photos of her guests. She bases her shows on four simple principles – use simple ingredients, use regular household appliances, cook food people like and have fun.

Flip on the television Monday night, and you won't catch Hejl whipping up a foie gras or roasting a rack of lamb.

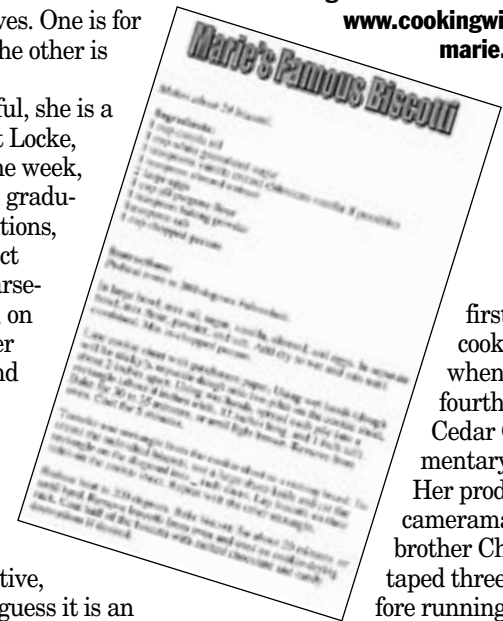
"I want to use recipes on my show that viewers will really use," Hejl said. "Most people I know, myself included, don't have time or the desire to make really complicated dishes. I want to show viewers that cooking is not as hard as it might seem."

Hejl's favorite ingredients are fresh herbs, olive oil, vegetables, fish and lean white meats. She likes to shake those ingredients up a bit, design a menu theme and add in an interesting guest and some kind of unusual field trip. The whole experience makes for one heck of a half-hour cooking show.

In November, she took two attorney friends, Seth Meisel and Elissa Underwood, out to Capitol City Trap and Skeet Club to film a segment and take aim at a few clay pigeons. To go along with the theme, Hejl showed her audience how to put together a wild game menu normal people can pull off.

A self-taught cook, Hejl is no novice to the world of television. She taped her

Hejl's recipes, like this one for a popular Italian dessert cookie, are available free of charge on her Web site at www.cookingwithmarie.com.



first television cooking show when she was a fourth-grader in Cedar Creek Elementary School. Her producer and cameraman was older brother Chris. They taped three shows before running out of money. Those shows got the

television duo a guest spot on "Good Morning America."

Laura Patrick, daughter of Eanes school board member Clint Sayers, has been good friends with Hejl since the ninth grade. Patrick recently filmed a cooking segment with Hejl where she gave away the family secret to making simple chili. She said it is Hejl's genuineness and her natural talent to make things fun that keep them friends.

"Marie inspires me," said Patrick. "She's always thinking about how she can take things in her personal life and her professional life and make them better. She stays relaxed. She is fearless."

Hejl films her show out of the new West Lake Hills house her parents, local realtors Jim and Rosalind Hejl, designed and built last year. The house includes a large kitchen with a 13-by-5-foot granite island just perfect for a television chef.

On a Saturday morning in early January, Hejl stands in her parents' kitchen with Reese Ryan, son of baseball legend Nolan Ryan and the current chief financial officer of the Round Rock Express. Dressed in a Round Rock Express jersey with a three-person film crew whirling frenetically around her, Hejl is calm and having a good time. She spent hours the night before getting everything ready for the taping, and she is looking at another four hours out of her weekend to tape the segment. She considers the time well spent.

"Last night after work, I was driving through traffic to the store to pick up ingredients for today's show and I thought, 'What am I doing? Why am I not heading home to relax and do absolutely nothing?'" she said. "But then the cooking and the taping starts and I remember why I do it. You can't beat the fun."