

## **What's Cooking? Someone's in the kitchen at the FNCC**

**By NIKKI AMDUR  
Contributing Editor**

Conferences at the FNCC are a four-star delight: Members revel in the comfortable accommodations. They're stimulated by daily discussions. They gawk at the alligator wrestling on the off-site tour. And they really love the food!

And who wouldn't? Prepared by SGI members who are professional chefs, with constantly varying menus that include the freshest vegetables and most luscious fruits, the meals fortify both body and spirit.

It may take a tough man to make a tender chicken, but Food Service Manager Richard Kawai has a more mellow attitude toward running this successful enterprise. His three guidelines to the chefs are: Have a good time. Don't forget to smile. And remember to treat others the way you want to be treated.

Mr. Kawai's warm spirit permeates the comfortable wicker-furnished dining room and even spills out onto the patio, where many of the members enjoy their meals under umbrella tables overlooking Toda Lake.

The action heats up in the kitchen, too. Each week four chefs — volunteer professionals from a pool of 88 chefs from 19 states — work 12- to 16-hour days (with a welcome break on Saturday to catch a few rays) preparing three squares for appetites piqued by days in the warm Florida sun. Recipes are selected democratically: When the chefs arrive, they all sit down with Mr. Kawai and decide what dishes to make based on each chef's talents and specialties. "You can do 10 different things with a flounder," explains Mr. Kawai. "Every person has their own style."

The type of cuisine may vary with each chef, but the challenge of preparing 150–200 meals three times a day is constant. And even that impressive goal pales beside the original one of making 800 dinners each day when the FNCC opened in June 1996.

With 21 chefs behind the burners, the enormous task was accomplished, thanks in part to SGI President Ikeda's encouragement. "He came right into the cafeteria to thank the people working there," recalls Mr. Kawai. "President Ikeda always talks about the importance of encouraging people working behind the scenes, and his actions are equal to his words." All the chefs' efforts came in handy back home: Four of those valiant 21 have opened restaurants since then.

Because most chefs work late hours, many don't have the chance to attend their district discussion meetings, which are often scheduled in the evening. That's why working at the FNCC is a golden opportunity for them to be encouraged in faith by participating in a behind-the-scenes activity.

Some are concerned about being away from their restaurants so long, but most find that while the chef's away, business is booming. When Chef George Yamazawa called to check on things, he was happy to hear the buzz of satisfied diners in the background. Mr. Yamazawa has become so successful that he has built a personal community center with a 100-seat Gohonzon room for the members.

Mr. Kawai is always on the lookout for cutting-edge recipes, attending food shows at the Fort Lauderdale Convention Center and checking out local restaurants to get new ideas. Menus are customized to participants as well. For the junior high and high school division conferences, teen favorites like pizza, hamburgers and tacos are served.

Such attention to detail and consideration for the individual have resulted in a creative and smoothly functioning operation that people just can't stop talking about — and a tendency, alas, for appreciative diners to put on five pounds in a weekend. For Richard

Title: What's Cooking?

Subject: World Tribune 11/21/97 n.3166 p.1 WT971121p01

Author: Nikki Amdur

Keywords: Cooking Features FNCC News Organization Special

Kawai, seeing the members' life-conditions soar during their stay at the FNCC makes the long hours and many painstaking efforts worthwhile.

Now the big question: Does he himself like to cook? "No," he admits. "But I like to eat!" And, at the FNCC, so do we.

**WT**

Title: What's Cooking?  
Subject: World Tribune 11/21/97 n.3166 p.1 WT971121p01  
Author: Nikki Amdur  
Keywords: Cooking Features FNCC News Organization Special