

# Dinner on a shoestring

*Queens Galley shows how to stretch your food dollar - healthfully and deliciously*

by Paul Smart

Diane Reeder happened onto the idea behind her open-armed new project, Queens Galley, through the sort of adversity most of us don't like to talk about. An adversity, that is, involving the stomach. And hunger.

Reeder realized, making it through what she now calls

"a time of underemployment" when she had to keep her family's weekly groceries bill down in the \$20 bill range, that she had the means of coping with such difficulties because she'd been there before, when her dad raised she and her siblings single-handedly on a similarly-stressed budget.

"My father worked like a dog and had four kids to look after. Fortunately, he had been taught by his father, my grandfather, how to stretch a paycheck," says Reeder, explaining the genesis of her own decision to start teaching the "food insecure" what she had learned. Ways to shop for staples, and then use good old cooking techniques to overcome the "can-opener chef" syndrome that's stumped so many younger families who can't seem to survive beyond what's on the more convenient - and expensive - shelves of the local supermarket.

Along the way, Reeder figured she could also pass on the lessons she's learned about feeding her own family of three kids - a 13-year-old, a 9-year-old and a 16-monther - so they start overcoming the peer pressure of always wanting what's not good for them ... or their family's budgets.

"The idea really gelled when I was at the Farmers' Market here in Uptown Kingston one Saturday and I noticed some women trying to figure out how to spend the \$24 in state subsidy checks they get for farmers' market produce each week," she continues, charting the full story of Queens Galley, which will be the recipient of a Valentine's Weekend fundraiser at LaMirage next Saturday, February 12. "I realized a lot more people than I realized didn't know how to spend money on good, healthy food. They were looking at fiddleheads, for instance, not knowing that cooked in a bit of olive oil, with garlic, they make a great pasta sauce ..."

That epiphany, of the \$24 checks and fiddlehead pastas, was three years ago. The rest, one could say, is nothing but yummy and productively frugal history.

In that time, Reeder has roped in the volunteer services of a large number of local chefs to teach classes on ways to stretch a dollar, and the foodstuffs in one's fridge or larder. A not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization, Queens Galley features programs are taught in its home kitchen adjacent to Knightly Endeavors, her husband Jay's Wall Street business that specializes in Renaissance-era clothing. New programs are currently being planned in tandem with Michael Berg of Family, including classes at the venerable social service institution's Darmstadt Shelter for the domestically abused, as well as



*Husband-and-wife team Diane and Jay Reeder of Queens Galley.*

[ Fionn Reilly ]

at their teen-oriented Midway Home.

"Rather than give food to people we show them what to do to make the food they have get the biggest nutritional and flavor impact for their dollar," Reeder says of her mission.

She then shares a pile of information from a December 2001 U.S. Department of Agriculture survey that found that 16 percent of American households with children were food insecure at some point during the previous year, with roughly one quarter of those families food insecure to the point of hunger due to lack of financial resources to obtain food. Worse, 52 percent of those surveyed said that they believed their budgets could not allow for balanced meals.

"It takes planning and cooking," Reeder says of her basic course load. "Say you've got a limited budget. Buy a chicken or, if you can afford it, a turkey. Stock up on dried beans and grains. Get your staples - onions, sugar, flour. Some basic vegetables. You make a chicken dinner on Sunday. Then make sure all the leftovers get scrapped down. Save the carrot tops, the old onions and potatoes. That'll help with a good potato salad, a chicken salad. But you'll also get a decent casserole, if you've bought barley, out of that chicken too. Voila - three meals!"

Continuing, Reeder notes how peanut butter can be used for more than sandwiches. Mixed with soy sauce, you can get a decent pasta sauce. Or how the adding of some carrots to homemade macaroni and cheese will not only give your kids the orangey Kraft look they think they want, but a decent hidden dose of Vitamin A as well.

"I promised recipes ... here are three to choose from," she writes in an e-mail, excited to be mentioned in the paper. "All of them cost out to less than \$1 per serving, in the case of the chili when made with dry beans will be less than 45 cents per serving. The kielbasa fiesta is great for Super Bowl Sunday; it can pair with nacho chips, toasted pita bread, corn bread or rice ..."

### **YOGURT MUFFIN-CAKE**

1 1/2 cups all purpose flour  
 2 tsp baking powder  
 1 8 oz container vanilla yogurt  
 1/2 cup sugar  
 3 eggs  
 1/2 tsp vanilla extract  
 1/2 cup oil (vegetable, canola or a blend)

Preheat oven to 350. Prepare a loaf pan (8x4x2) generously with butter or line muffin tins with paper liners. Combine yogurt, eggs, vanilla and oil until evenly mixed. Add sugar and stir to dissolve. Add dry ingredients and combine until just incorporated, don't over mix but you want the batter to be smooth. Pour into prepared pan. Bake for approximately 50 minutes or until top is golden and tester inserted in center comes out clean. Cool, slice and serve.

### **KIELBASA FIESTA (JUST IN TIME FOR THE SUPER BOWL)**

2 tsp oil  
 1 lb Kielbasa cut into large dice (bite sized chunks)  
 1 large onion (about a cup)  
 2 garlic cloves smashed, peeled and chopped  
 3 tbsp chili powder  
 1/2 tsp or more to taste crushed red pepper flakes  
 1 tbsp dry oregano  
 1 small can tomato paste  
 4 cups vegetable or chicken stock or broth  
 8 oz assorted dried beans that have been soaked and cooked until almost

tender.

Saut•e kielbasa in oil until browned. Remove. Add onion, garlic and spices to the pan drippings. Add tomato paste and cook until color deepens. Add stock then beans and return kielbasa to pan, stir and scrape up browned bits from the pan. Simmer on low 30 min until beans are very tender, or add everything to a slow cooker and set on low for one hour and allow to simmer. (Extend this the next day by adding elbow macaroni and even further by adding additional stock to make a hearty winter soup. You can substitute pork, turkey or chicken or completely eliminate the meat for a vegetarian bean chili.

### **CREAMY GARLIC CHEESE PASTA**

8 oz spiral pasta  
 2 tbsp oil  
 4 garlic cloves peeled and chopped  
 2 tbsp flour  
 1 cup milk  
 1 cup chicken stock  
 2 oz cream cheese  
 1/2 oz fontina cheese (or any hard grating cheese such as Romano or parmesan)  
 1/4 tsp salt  
 1/4 tsp ground black pepper

Cook pasta according to directions until al dente. Saut•e garlic in oil until just beginning to brown, do not burn it! Add flour and whisk steadily for 1 minute. Add stock, milk and cream cheese. Whisk until smooth and mixture thickens. Add remaining cheese, salt and pepper. Toss in pasta to coat. Serves 4-6 (Get a bigger nutritional impact by adding bright green peas or spinach to this dish. Create something completely different by adding a can of diced tomatoes instead of the stock. Add grilled or roasted chicken to the final dish.

"The key to making this pasta dish work well is that last ounce of grated cheese. Whenever possible use GOOD ingredients in small amounts to brighten a frugal dish," Reeder adds. "The entree becomes more expensive when pre-grated processed cheese is used because you have to use so much more of it to get the same flavor impact. We suggest purchasing a small wedge and grating it when needed, you'll save money in the long run.

Adding up her basic tips for conquering food insecurity, and stretching one's budget into the worlds of the gourmand, Reeder gives her basic pointers: 1. Shop wisely. Plan menus, check the circulars carefully and use coupons; 2. Before shopping, go to [cutouthunger.org](http://cutouthunger.org) and see what the best deals are for our local markets; 3. Use local seasonal ingredients when possible; 4. Learn basic cooking skills. Knowing how to make your own stock or how to create a simple sauce will save you hundreds of dollars during the year; 5. Take into account what items are on sale, as well as what has been discounted.

"Right now, I feel what we do is really needed, and I feel honored that Michael Berg has seen this. I'm so honored Family has asked us to join their family," added Reeder of her mission, and her drive to not have others face the adversity she has faced ... at least not without her ability to make the best of it.

The Queens Galley Valentine's Day benefit takes place on Saturday February 12, from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. at LaMirage steakhouse, with a \$35 general admission ticket buying dinner, decadent chocolate fondue dessert, coffee or tea, keepsake roses, more chocolate and the musical wizardry of DJ Wavy Davy. To purchase tickets online go to [http://www.nycharities.org/event/event.asp?CE\\_ID=219](http://www.nycharities.org/event/event.asp?CE_ID=219).

For further information on Reeder and Queens Galley, visit their website at [www.thequeensgalley.org](http://www.thequeensgalley.org), write Queens Galley, c/o Knightly Endeavors, 319 Wall Street, Kingston, NY 12401, or call them at 331-0567.

