



With help from Charleen Sellers (left) in the kitchen, caterer Sue Price is able to do what she does best. "My favorite part is talking to people," she says.

## Spice girl

ABIGAIL'S CATERING OWNER SUE PRICE MAKES PLAN B A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS.

**WALKING INTO ABIGAIL'S** Catering is like getting hugged by a big clove of garlic. And that's a good thing.

But owner Sue Price gives her clients much more than great food experiences. It's her spicy personality that keeps people coming back.

Price's entry into the catering world wasn't actually planned. Ten years ago, she and her husband, Buddy, originally wanted to purchase a bed-and-breakfast. While doing their research, the couple realized that taking out a loan would require proving they could pay it back. They decided to try catering to show they knew how to turn a profit. The business became so successful that they outgrew their space (originally a boat port on their

property), Sue quit her full-time job to handle the workload and they wondered why they considered a bed-and-breakfast in the first place.

"You have to be able to move to Plan B," Sue says, punctuating almost every sentence with her hands, which caused her visitors to wonder how she's ever able to stir pots of crawfish and corn soup.

For a couple who made up the rules as they went along, Buddy and Sue are both thrilled at the milestones their company has reached a decade along. So far for 2010, they've doubled last year's business. And it's due in large part to Abigail, the company's fictitious namesake.

"We wanted an 'A' word, so we'd be first in the phone book," Sue says, add-

ing that the biblical Abigail's ability to provide a feast for the future King David saved her household from tragedy.

"She has become my alter ego," Sue explains. "Abigail says, 'Yeah, you can do that.'"

That's been Sue's mantra, whether she's providing finger foods for a baby shower or a sit-down dinner for 600. Though some days start at 5 a.m. and last until 8 p.m., Sue loves it when business is booming. Besides, she quips, "Abigail is greedy."

The friendly New Orleans native loves to cook, though she first learned her craft out of state.

"I went to a convent boarding school in St. Martin, Ohio. The nuns taught us

how to cook, set the table, and even walk with books on our heads. But no typing class," she says.

After graduation, Sue headed to Lafayette and what was then the University of South Louisiana, where she says she learned to drink Bud Light. That course of study may explain why she "finished school quickly, in just two years ... by flunking out." Thanks to her father, who had an engineering firm, she found work in drafting. Thirty years later, she left the field to see what Abigail had in store for her.

Much of the company's business is from repeat customers, who no doubt love Sue's sparkle as much as they do her food. And neither is ever boring. You won't find a tray of cheese cubes, a chafing dish of meatballs or a salad with Italian dressing from Abigail's Catering. Instead, you'll see a black olive and blue cheese ball, white chicken chili and marinated vegetables.

"How many times have you heard someone say, 'That's the best damn finger sandwich I've ever had?'" Sue asks.

In fact, Sue doesn't even like to provide printed menu options for catering jobs, preferring instead to discuss exactly what her clients need. She asks questions, suggests possibilities and aims to give each client a little something extra while working within almost any budget.

Last year, while on her own weight-loss journey, Sue added a low-fat menu of 25 items that are pre-portioned, vacuum packed and flash frozen. The meals, which are available for delivery or pickup, come in individual portions, quarts, or pans for families and worksites. Those familiar with Weight Watchers' points system can even track the value of these dishes, which taste anything but low-fat. The aforementioned crawfish and corn soup (just 4.5 points) is a must-try.

It's hard to imagine what's next for Sue, a woman who has proved she's not afraid to take on a challenge, even if she doesn't always see herself that way.

"I just turned 60. I thought I'd be growing herbs and baking cookies at this age," she says. "There's so much more that I want to do. It's really no fun staying where you are." ■

By JAMIE CRAIG  
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