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## Cooking outside the box

The first time she tried to cook, she was barely in her teens. When her mother wasn't home, she would bust out the old Betty Crocker cookbooks and try out the recipes. But all Kristi Boone ever made was a mess, leaving the kitchen covered in a film of flour.

Cooking, she says, was not her strong point.

But all that changed in her early 20s when a friend's aunt showed her cooking outside the box.

Kristi came from a hamburgers and spaghetti household, but this woman introduced her to more interesting things — fresh beets with sour cream, that kind of thing.

"She was so adventurous in the kitchen, and she forced me to try her recipes," says Kristi, 31, of Olathe. "I tried them out of fear, but she inspired me to try different things I never ate before and to cook differently."

More and more Kristi began to experiment with cooking. She hosted dinner parties. Soon she realized she was good at it. Eventually her hobby became a serious passion.

She began typing her grocery lists in Excel. She made menus for her meals and experimented with different flavors. So two years ago, when she was laid off from her job as a sales administrator, she saw it as an opportunity to pursue cooking as a career.

"I couldn't go to culinary school and do a full-time internship at a restaurant," she said. "I had too many bills, and I didn't really want to cook at a restaurant. As I explored other options, I discovered the American Personal & Private Chef Association. They offered classes and seminars to get you set up as a personal chef, and I did it."

In April, after a year of training, she launched her own business, Gourmet Solutions ([gourmetsolutionskc.com](http://gourmetsolutionskc.com)).

"It seems surreal. It's exciting and a little scary to not be working for someone else, but I just can't believe someone pays me to do what I like to do" (prices start at \$240 a week).

Among her paying clients is the Surtain family, as in Chiefs cornerback Patrick Surtain. Twice a week she comes to their home — that way it's as fresh as possible — and makes two meals per visit.

On a recent Wednesday she showed up in her white chef jacket, her blond hair pulled back into a ponytail. She hauled in everything she needed — fresh groceries in a rolling cooler, and seasonings, bowls, utensils, pots, pans and cleaning supplies in two big blue bins.

She put seasonings on the counter and cleaned all of the veggies, meat and fish for two meals: rosemary and goat cheese-stuffed chicken, with sautéed cabbage and ricotta-stuffed mushrooms, and margarita grilled salmon with tropical fresca, peas with mint and shallot and Chinese cucumber salad.

First up for preparation was the salad. With a spicy citrus kick, it looked Food Network fancy.

After preparing each dish, she wrapped and packaged them and put them in the fridge. She washed the dishes and put them in her tub. She packed up her trash.

By the time the Surtains got home, Kristi would be gone.

The family would have two meals in the fridge. The kitchen would be spotless. A menu on the table would list reheating directions.

"I want it to be like I was never there, but dinner is ready. I don't feel like I am a part of their family, but I do feel like I help them have time to do more important things," she says.

"I like that they need me, and I help good families keep themselves and their children healthy."

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