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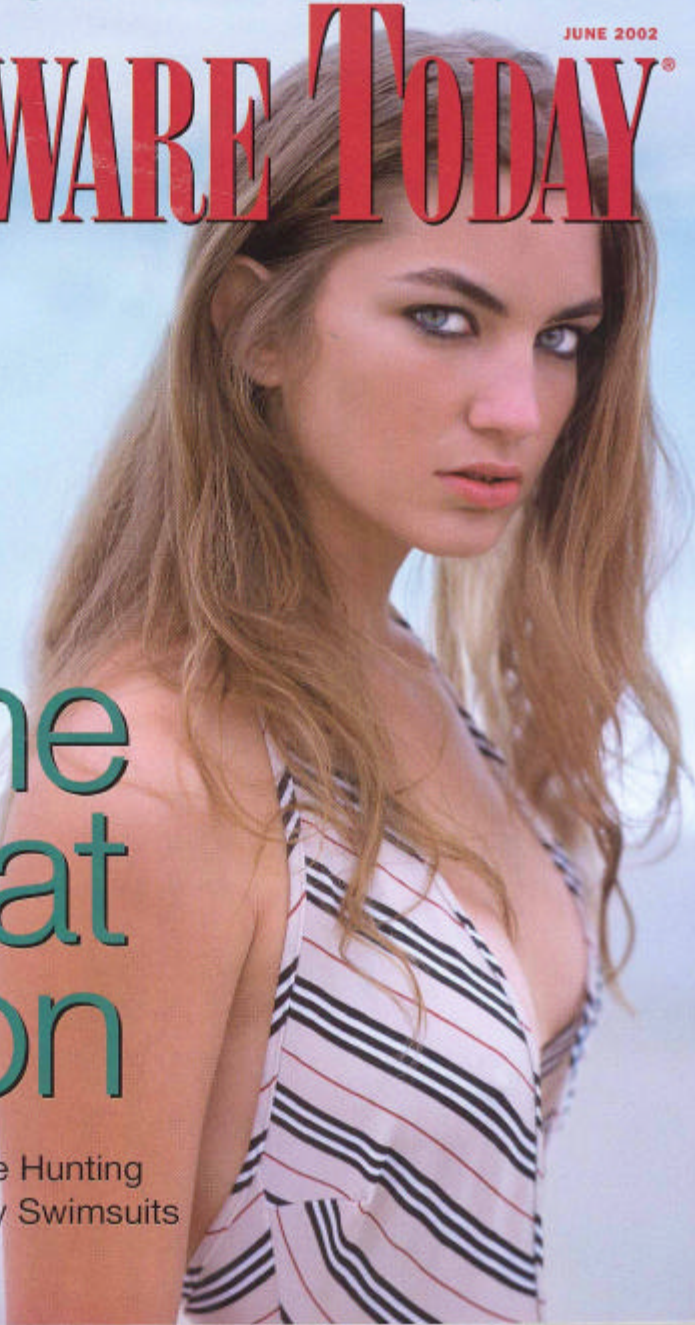
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Kitchen Coaches

The kitchen has become the social hub of the house, a place not just for cooking and eating, but for family meetings and conversation. A microcosm of this atmosphere has been brought to Independence Mall Shopping Center in Wilmington, where master chefs provide demonstrations and hands-on instruction of cooking techniques in a fun, friendly atmosphere.

Celebrity Kitchens, an idea developed by co-owner Cindy Weiner, opened March 10. "People tend to congregate in kitchens," she says. "We've made this a very warm, intimate setting. It's kind of like going out to dinner and getting a show at the same time." Celebrity Kitchens offers a variety of classes including vegetarian, gourmet, heart-healthy and light-cuisine meals most days of the week, depending upon chef availability. Dinner is paired with a select wine and participants take home the recipe to create on their own.

"Not only are you going to learn how to cook," Weiner says, "but you're going to make contact with a chef you won't normally see in a restaurant. We want our chefs interacting with all our guests." And that is exactly how it works. Celebrity Kitchens is a small studio and demonstration classes are limited to 24 people, hands-on classes to 12.

Weiner, previously an attorney in Pennsylvania, currently resides in Wilmington and has had a passion for cooking for as long as she can remember. "I never felt quite fulfilled as a lawyer," she says. "It wasn't the same as when you dive into a kitchen and create these masterpieces."

Co-owner and business partner Angela Martinez has also played an important role in the development of Celebrity Kitchens. Weiner was diagnosed with breast cancer one year ago and she says concentrating on organizing the business with Martinez helped her get through the chemotherapy treatments. They would drive from Wilmington to Trenton, N.J., or Philadelphia to find kitchen tables and accessories and to price equipment. "It was a dream coming true," Weiner says.

Celebrity Kitchens' success is keeping Weiner and Martinez happy and they plan to expand the number and variety of classes.

"When you watch the Food Network on TV, you do learn something, but there's nothing like actually being there," Weiner says. "There's nothing like creating [things] with your hands that not only taste good, but are really works of art."

— Jill Liebowitz