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(e.g. "sushi #0622" or "BYOB Italian")

GO

Home > Restaurants > Story > From their families to yours

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Chicago chefs cook up some holiday memories

By Dawn Reiss
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The holiday season is all about family and sharing. OK, it's really about getting presents, but, you know, cut us some slack—we're trying to get into the spirit. To help us out, we asked local chefs about some of their favorite family holiday dishes that they're sharing with you this year.

His goose is cooked

Chef-owner Didier Durand of **Cyrano's Bistrot** doesn't let traditions—particularly his beloved French ones—die easily. He is, after all, one of the most outspoken critics of the city's foie gras ban. For Christmas, however, he revives a tradition that's even closer to his heart: a holiday menu inspired by his childhood in Bergerac, France. Cyrano's Christmas Eve prix-fixe dinner offers options such as a plump **roasted goose**—and what would a French Christmas be without it?—a **bûche de Noël**. Durand says he watched his mom, who died in 1987, prepare the same meal for his extended family each holiday. "I miss her. She was my mentor," he says. "By sharing [her recipes], I'm

sharing her with my customers."

The potato perfectionist

Mindy Segal of **Hot Chocolate** may be among the most successful chefs in town, but when it comes to **potato latkes**, there's one person who even she can't top. "My mom makes the best latkes ever," she crows. "They're so crispy and delicious ... [They] remind me of my childhood." So last year when she put them on Hot Chocolate's menu for Hanukkah—which she will do again this year—she made sure that the kitchen staff was trained by Mom herself, who taught the kitchen pros how to prep the perfect potato pancake. If the latkes (\$6) whet your appetite for more of Mom's cooking after this year's Festival of Lights, order the smoked fish platter (\$12), which is always on the menu. It's served with a side of noodle kugel, also based on Segal's mom's holiday recipe.

Crepe expectations

Growing up in Algeria, **Icosium Kafe** chef-owner Belkacem Elmetennani looked forward to the winter solstice celebration each year because it meant a chance to indulge in his grandmother's **sweet and savory crepes**. Today, with two Chicago crepe houses (he also owns **Crepe and Coffee Palace**), Elmetennani has turned his grandmother's seasonal specialty into a year-round business. But Grandma wasn't quick to give up her secrets. "She'd tell us, 'If you watch me make the batter and the crepes, you're going to have pimples,'" Elmetennani says. Instead, while grandma cooked, Elmetennani would spend the day in the woods picking mushrooms to use in her crepes. Today, you can sample the family tradition year round in Icosium's savory portabella mushroom crepes (\$6.95) and the chocolate crepes (\$4.75), filled with gooey, dark Swiss chocolate.

Mangia Mia!

Spiaggia chef Tony Mantuano may hail from Kenosha, Wis., but at Christmastime, his family reached back to their Italian roots. A dish of shellfish and pasta was always on the table. Today, you can get a taste of Mantuano's family custom with his **Linguine Con Vongole** (\$16). The dish of pasta, garlic and clams in a white wine sauce is served at **Cafe Spiaggia**, the less formal space down the hall from his four-star restaurant. The recipe refines a dish his grandmother served every Christmas. "It was always something we looked forward to, [and] it still is," Mantuano says. "It's always been about family, and getting together and having seafood on a day when traditionally, restaurants are closed." To create your own traditions, head to Mantuano's Italian Holiday Favorites cooking class on Dec. 22. \$75 gets you a three-course meal with a glass of sparkling Italian wine.

On the lamb

Coming from four generations of butchers, there was no question what would be on the holiday menu when Viand chef Steve Chiappetti was growing up in Chicago's Beverly neighborhood: meat—and plenty of it. But unlike most days, when Chiappetti's father brought home leftover cuts, including tongue and kidneys, Christmas Eve meant the only the best—especially lamb shank. "It's a classic family holiday tradition that I brought to my restaurant," Chiappetti says. Look for his signature **braised lamb shank**—a favorite on the à la carte menu—on Viand's special \$20 Christmas Day multicourse prix-fixe meal. The shank is served with lentils and braised leeks with a pinot noir reduction.

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