

The Art of Feeding Steelers

For a Georgia Bulldogs fan, Chef Corey Hayes is a bit off the beaten track. The Athens, GA, native is executive chef for the Parkhurst Dining Services operation at the headquarters and training facility of the Pittsburgh Steelers.

With the Steelers, Hayes is responsible for daily midweek meals during the season for the Steelers players, coaches and staff. He also serves meals over the offseason to staff who work year-round at the complex.

Since the Steelers share the facility with the University of Pittsburgh Panthers football team—it's the only dual college/pro facility in the country—Hayes and his staff of five (plus extras from other nearby Parkhurst operations as needed) also cooks for them.

It's a busy schedule from around March to whenever the Steelers end their season, which often isn't until January. The complex remains open over the off-season, and Hayes serves the skeleton crew of around 20 staffers, plus some visitors from nearby government offices.

Not bad for a chef who started his career with grocery chain Giant Eagle. He went from there to culinary school and worked in commercial restaurants before joining Parkhurst. He worked in Parkhurst units at Bayer Corp. and Carnegie Mellon University before winding up with the Steelers in 2004.

What's your weekly schedule?

We do three meals a day on practice days—Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Tuesday is players' day off and I do two meals then. We have to be ready to go at the drop of a dime, though. If I get a phone call to say the schedule changed, I have to be ready.

How many people?

There are 92 players, including those on the injured list, plus 18 coaches and office staff. Pitt has 120 players and coaches plus some 20 more staffers. Generally, breakfast is 100-120

people, lunch 250-300 and dinner about 200, including Pitt players.

What's the menu like?

Mondays are my open day, so I do what I feel like doing. If I have fresh herbs from my garden, I'll use that. I'll also use what local stuff is available. Our counts go way up on Tuesdays because it's media day. So that's usually pasta day because it's easy and simple. Wednesday is fish day. Thursdays are salad days with special salads made to order. Fridays I try to make two entrees, with one themed to the team we play, like fish tacos for the San Diego Chargers game. I don't usually have to worry about them on Saturday because the team stays together at a hotel, even if they're playing at home, the night before a game.

Many wouldn't think of football players as salad eaters...

A lot of them like it, though some will have the salad and then want french fries. But you can't please everybody.

How many entrees usually?

Normally I only have one entree because the cafeteria is so small, but I have a full deli, sandwiches grilled to order, salad bar, desserts. Buffalo chicken wrap is a huge favorite.

Does Pitt get the same menu?

They get a different menu at night, with more dinner selections. On Sundays, they get a high-end meal—carved prime rib, New York strips and brunch selections like eggs and bacon.

Does your Southern upbringing ever come out in your menu?

Very much. I try to keep a lot of it home-style because these guys—especially the college players—are away from home, and it is much appreciated. Every three weeks, I do a downhome meal with fried chicken, cornmeal breaded catfish and the works—they love that!



Chef Corey Hayes

How is current coach Mike Tomlin different from former coach Bill Cowher?

Tomlin watches more what the players eat, to make sure healthier things are offered. Cowher was more "give them what they want." I don't do as much fried food and cream soups now.

How did you wind up in Pittsburgh?

My wife is from here. My first job in the area was at a Giant Eagle grocery store. I told them I loved to cook so they put me in the culinary department making prepared foods. The chef there mentored me, telling me where to go to culinary school. I actually stayed with Giant Eagle while I went to the International Culinary School.

Tell me about your herb garden...

The chef here before me started it but I've made it bigger and kept it going. It's in a patch of ground about a foot wide and the length of the cafe, about 20 feet. I plant it myself, water and take care of it. I do the basics—basil, oregano, cilantro, parsley, thyme, sage, rosemary. I started planting chives last year. I planted garlic bulbs this year but they take three years to grow. Something different...

So you have a green thumb...

I was raised on a hundred-acre farm and we always planted when we were kids.

Is that where your love of cooking started?

My grandfather was a mess sergeant in the army and the uncle who raised me also loved to cook. That's where I get it, I think.

What were your favorite dishes as a kid?

Chicken noodle casserole and fried apple pies. My grandmother who made the pie is getting up in years now, so whenever I go home, my family is happy because I make them.

Do you ever make them for the Steelers?

No. Too fattening...

Favorite Meal:
fried chicken, collard
greens and fried apple pie

**Greatest Chef
Influence:**
Chef Boyd Richardson with
Giant Eagle Stores

Hobbies:
deer hunting, camping

Favorite Movie:
Red Dawn

**Most Memorable
Restaurant
Experience:**
Post-wedding dinner in
the Eiffel Tower restaurant
atop the Paris Hotel in
Las Vegas