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## Hail to the chef

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**Cooking at the White House comes filled with challenges**  
 January 13, 2009 - 10:30 PM

*Bernie Petit and Allison Flynn*

President-elect Barack Obama, wife Michelle and their daughters, 10-year-old Malia and seven-year-old Sasha, are a family of foodies.

The incoming president loves chili, disdains beets and is not into carbs. He and the future first lady enjoy Mexican food and handcrafted pastas, while their kids love fried chicken and mac and cheese. Keeping them all well-fed and happy will be the job of current White House executive chef Cristeta Comerford. If anybody knows the enormous task she has before her, it would be Martin Mongiello, a former White House chef and executive chef at presidential retreat Camp David.

Mongiello and wife Stormy, who is originally from Cleveland County, moved to Grover last February and opened The Inn of the Patriots, a bed and breakfast, in June.

At the pristine, 130-year-old house built by Dr. Alfred Hambricht - the great-great-grandson of Revolutionary War Col. Frederick Hambricht - the Mongiellos' Presidential Culinary Museum displays presidential china, culinary medals and wooden eggs from the White House Easter Egg Roll.

Mongiello and his staff also regularly whip up recipes favored by various presidents and first families for guests of the inn. "People here in the Carolinas are just as interested in good food as people elsewhere," said Mongiello.

### COOKING IN THE WHITE HOUSE

It's not as glamorous as it sounds, Mongiello said. "You work long, hard hours and it's difficult sometimes to get people to help," he said. That's because the clearance process eliminates many candidates and takes months to complete. Then there are the challenges of preparing menus for the hundreds of foreign dignitaries visiting from around the world. "If someone asked for something, you're always told the answer is "Yes sir," Mongiello said. "It only took one person to ask for something and it was "Yes, we're going to do it."

Although it had undergone through some upgrades before his tour of duty, Mongiello recalls the White House kitchen as "a normal kitchen." During his time at there, he cooked under former White House executive chef Walter Scheib III and was part of a staff that prepared state dinners.

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Jeff Melton  
 Martin Mongiello, a former White House chef and executive chef at presidential retreat Camp David.

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