

Meet The Member

CAROL WILLIAMSON
HEAD COOK

SARTELL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Tell us about your role:

I have worked in the Sartell School District Nutrition Services in various schools since 2009 as a table wiper, cashier, food service worker, cook's helper, cook, and now head cook.

How did you first get involved with MSNA, and in what ways has being a member contributed to your career growth?

I first joined MSNA when my coworkers convinced me to attend the Annual Conference. I've gone every year since and enjoy the variety of workshops and the new ideas I take away from them.

What do you enjoy most about your current position, and what motivates you to work in school nutrition?

I love the people I work with and enjoy having the opportunity to build a team that has fun together. Their enthusiasm is amazing! Last year, we did a flash mob dance for the students during each lunch shift and the kids loved it!

What do you think people often overlook about school nutrition that they should understand better?

I don't think people understand what a fast paced environment we work in, and I doubt they realize how much fun we have.

You created an employee "random fact" jar. Share how this has helped your team.

Every few months, we like to play a game together. One time, I asked everyone to write down a random fact about themselves. I compiled the list, gave everyone a copy, and we tried to guess which fact matched each person. At the end of the day, we went through the list, revealing one by one who each fact belonged to. The person with the most correct guesses won a prize. The real reward was the laughter and connection that came from learning about each other's past jobs, travel adventures, funny moments, and even a few surprising teenage escapades. These activities have helped us bond, understand each other better, and grow as a team all while having a lot of fun!

How have you been mentored throughout your school nutrition career, and have you had the opportunity to mentor others along the way?

I've worked under several head cooks over the years and learned something different from each one. I've come to understand the importance of training employees and empowering them to do their jobs well. Most importantly, I've learned how valuable it is to create an enjoyable workplace and I hope to pass that on.

Share more about the importance of building a relationship with vendors?

One of our delivery drivers once told me how much he enjoyed talking with us and getting to know us during his deliveries to our school. He mentioned that, as a driver, he spends most of his day alone, so we're essentially his coworkers. That made me realize how important it is to build rapport with our drivers.

What's the most popular meal on your lunch menu? Do you have a personal favorite, and why?

Some of our most popular entrées are Mandarin orange chicken over fried rice and brunch for lunch. Our new "sauce-your-own" wings have also been a big hit this year. Personally, I love the French bread pizza and I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I love our school hot dogs!