

## Meet The Member

### **TERESA STEINBACH**

KITCHEN MANAGER  
**ST. MICHAEL ELEMENTARY**

**ST. MICHAEL-ALBERTVILLE  
SCHOOLS**

*"I leave each day  
with a full heart  
knowing that,  
even for a  
brief moment,  
I've made an  
impact in the day  
of a child."*



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

I began with STMA Foodservice in February of 2012 and immediately fell in love with the work. I wanted to learn more about school food service, so I attended my first MSNA conference in 2013 and have been a member ever since. Being a member and utilizing the free online education resources has been instrumental in pursuing my SNA certification and achieving career advancement opportunities.

I look forward to attending the annual conference every year, as it not only provides educational and networking opportunities, but it's also an energizing event leading us into the new school year. For this year's 2025 MSNA Annual Conference, I signed up to serve on the volunteer committee, and it was a really fun and rewarding opportunity. I got a glimpse into all the work and preparation that goes on behind the scenes, and let me just say, the MSNA conference committee does a tremendous job putting it all together!

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

What I love most about my position as Kitchen Manager, first and foremost, is the opportunity to provide for children and the sense of purpose that comes with it. Although I know I will not get rich doing what I do, I can leave each day with a full heart knowing that, even for a brief moment, I've made an impact in the day of a child. Of course, I can't do this alone. I have an extraordinary team who works very hard each and every day. The laughter, the fun, the teamwork, and the positive culture they've helped create are the reasons why our kitchen is successful and such a fun place to work.

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

I feel there is a common misconception that school lunches aren't "healthy." We should encourage parents and caregivers to join us, be our guest during a lunch service. Come experience the beautiful array of fresh and local fruits and vegetables offered daily. See that our chicken tenders are whole-grain and made with whole-muscle chicken, and that our spaghetti sauce is homemade. Learn that we serve quality foods while limiting salt, sugar, fats, and artificial colors. Understand that the lunches we offer are often the healthiest meal of a student's day.

I also encourage parents and caregivers to read about the history of school lunches, how they began and the direction they are moving in today. It's an amazing evolution from the beef stew and buttered bread of my school days.

**Tell us more about the new recipes you've created and tested with students.**

My staff and I LOVE creating new recipes for our students. We've been instrumental in developing recipes such as homemade refrigerator dill pickles (my students go crazy for these), homemade macaroni and cheese, and homemade scrambled eggs. We've also created a copycat Cane's sauce for chicken tenders (we call it Knight's sauce) that students can't get enough of.

We once had a surplus of a particular brand of cheese pizza that we were committed to using, but unfortunately, the students didn't care for it at all. This inspired a moment of thinking outside the box. I sprinkled on some Italian seasonings and garlic powder for flavor and appearance, baked it, and cut it into strips. We served it with marinara sauce for dipping and called them Pizza Dunkers. We sampled them with the students, and they loved them. A new menu item was born!

Using that same cheese pizza, I also turned it into a breakfast pizza by adding fennel seed and ground sausage. This was another big hit with students; they were thrilled to have pizza for breakfast! Most recently, we created a warm cranberry apple bake that I'm eager to sample with the students.

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

Mentoring has been a valuable opportunity to both give and receive. I have been mentored throughout my career by my team of both former and current kitchen managers, in addition to my directors and their assistants. Each has contributed to building confidence and personal growth in my role as kitchen manager. Being a mentor to my staff is rewarding. It's a great way to share my own knowledge while building a strong and cohesive team. A team that is cross-trained in all areas, where each person is able to do one another's job, builds skills and increases the confidence of every member. I oversee two kitchens (in separate locations), so it is extremely important for my staff to be able to fill in at any position when they're called upon, and to do so confidently.

**Tell us how you have been involved with Spirit Days and celebrating school lunch initiatives**

My staff are super awesome in that they don't hesitate to assist with some of my over-the-top ideas! We love an excuse to wear matching shirts, costumes, or decorate the kitchen! Some of our memorable celebrations were NSBW '24, Surf's Up with School Breakfast. It was like Hawaii relocated to our kitchen! We had beach balls and sea creatures hanging from the ceiling, hula grass adorning the windows as curtains, made a playlist of Hawaiian music, and wore Hawaiian shirts, grass skirts, and flowered leis. We invited the students to dress up too! We offered a coloring contest, and all 500 entries were hung in the cafeteria. We chose a winner from each grade, with the prize being a flowered lei and a gift card for ice cream at the new ice cream shop in town.

Most recently, we celebrated NSLW '25, Trip Around the World with School Lunch. We hung inflatable globes from the ceiling with a 200-foot banner of flags from different countries around the world draped across and crisscrossed around the entire serving area; I believe 197 individual countries were represented. A memorable moment happened when a student pointed out a flag and said it was his favorite. When asked why, he said it was from his country, Kenya.

One of my favorite annual celebrations is National School Lunch Hero Day. We hang a large banner in the kitchen, and I bring in balloons for the week. I also provide lunch or special treats for my staff as my way of reminding them how awesome and appreciated they are. We have coloring sheets for the kids, which pair with all the artwork and cards we receive from the students. We display it all! My staff and I dress in superhero capes, masks, and shirts. The students love it!

For many years I've also displayed my set of *Lunch Lady* comic books. The students have always been in awe of the books, and many have exclaimed, "I wish I could read those." So last year, I decided to buy a new set and presented them to our school library in celebration of School Lunch Hero Day. Now the students can enjoy them anytime they'd like!

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

The most popular menu item for my students is French toast sticks. This menu actually set a lunch participation record for us this year, as we broke 600 for the first time ever with 606 meals served.

Although it's not their favorite by far, my personal favorite is Sloppy Joe's. Sounds weird, but I absolutely LOVE making Sloppy Joe's. We've transitioned to using raw ground beef, and that alone takes it up a notch. We cook the meat in our tilt skillet, add in the sauce ingredients, let it simmer, and it turns out absolutely wonderful! I had a student, sporting an orange Sloppy Joe mustache, come back to the kitchen and tell me they were the "Best Sloppy Joe's EVER." I would have to agree.