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Chef celebrates food & culture at NYHQ

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It's long been known that hospital food is no epicurean delight.

But to prove this wrong, New York Hospital Queens (NYHQ) recently hosted a delicious event celebrating cooking and cultures.

Celebrity chef Mai Pham was at NYHQ on Thursday, May 19, for a special event that included a cooking demonstration, tastings and a cookbook signing as Thai and Vietnamese culture and cuisine was celebrated.

"Part of my work is really not only to create food, but a big part of what I do, my passion, is to share the culture that I grew up with, and for me, I'm doing it through food and cooking," Pham said.

NYHQ has previously done other cooking demonstrations and special events.

Pham has done business with Sodexo, NYHQ's food and nutrition services partner, in the past. When they knew she was going to be in New York, Sodexo senior vice president of operations Rich Kuplicki said they "couldn't think of any other place to bring a world-renowned chef than NYHQ."

"I've always made it a mission to try to dispel that little joke about hospital food," Kuplicki said. "With New York Hospital Queens being such a diverse zip code, it's important to bring food and culinary delights from different cultures."

In addition to being the chef and owner of the California-based Lemon Grass Restaurant and Lemon Grass Asian Grill & Noodle Bar, Pham is the author of Pleasures of the Vietnamese Table, The Best of Vietnamese and Thai Cooking and Flavors of Asia.

This was the first time that Pham has done a demonstration at a hospital. Because she didn't know what to expect, she said she was a little apprehensive at first, but when she got to NYHQ, she found that "from top down everyone is enthusiastic."

"They were just very, very excited to have me here," she said. "I feel really grateful and happy that they're so open here and they want new things and they want to see...what different cultures are all about."

During her visit Pham, had a chance to meet with NYHQ's cafeteria staff. She said they were very curious and excited to be doing something new.

Kuplicki said he hopes the staff would learn from Pham's culinary skills and techniques, the way she conducts herself and her passion for education. He also said he wanted them to learn about "healthy food presented in a top-notch manner."



THE COURIER/Photos By Jessica Lyons
Chef Mai Pham shows the final product of her cooking demonstration.

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Pham said that she always finds it nice when she can change people's minds about food.

"I hope that they will see the world is just full of wonderful cultures and wonderful foods exist everywhere," she said. "If you live in the U.S. and you haven't branched out, you may not know that there are so many things out there that you have never eaten before."

Kuplicki said they will "definitely" be looking to serve the dish made during the recent event in the future, noting that sometimes they offer specials on their cafeteria menu.

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