



Innovation

It's a tall order for any chef. Oversee a kitchen where the menu changes weekly. Prepare recipes that feature fresh, seasonal ingredients. And, make sure all dishes are 475 calories or less. This is the mandate for Sous Chef James Petraikis and his culinary colleagues at Seasons 52, Darden's newest test concept that has been in operation for just over a year in Orlando. "You certainly can't complain about monotony," laughs James. "As a chef, it is challenging and intriguing. You're always learning something new."

Seasons 52 is the creation of Darden's internal New Business team that is charged with identifying and developing new restaurant concepts to help drive Darden's future growth. Seasons 52 is designed to not only be a great restaurant with delicious food and excellent service, but also to help our guests celebrate living well through seasonally-inspired, healthier dining. "We use no butter and we have no fryers in the restaurant," says James. "To impart a special flavor, most dishes are cooked on an oak-burning grill." With a constantly changing menu, the development of new seasonal recipes is an ongoing and arduous assignment. Every item undergoes rigorous taste-panel testing before going on the menu, and must pass very high benchmarks for taste and appearance.

Seasons 52's focus on seasonally inspired, nutritionally balanced cuisine, combined with a casually sophisticated atmosphere and wine bar has Darden poised to build a leadership position in yet another segment of casual dining. It's an effort that is well underway with the expansion of the Seasons 52 test to two new Florida locations in the coming months.

James Petraikis
Sous Chef
Seasons 52

Joining Darden's Seasons 52 has been a 180-degree culinary turn-around for James Petraikis. A graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, he is a trained chef whose career has been spent in some of America's finest dining rooms. Why the switch from dishes with rich cream sauces to light marinades? "I had worked several years ago with some of the creators of Seasons 52," he explains. "I was intrigued by the concept and felt a focus on lighter, healthier dining was a growing market that offered more opportunity for me." After just five months, James already is a manager-in-training and will shortly help open the second Seasons 52 in the Orlando area.