

## Redefining Senior Dining: Creativity and Connection on the Menu

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Chef Tony Crane never envisioned his culinary career leading him to a senior retirement community. A veteran of luxury dining with experience at the Ritz Carlton in San Francisco and later one of the world's largest culinary service providers, he thought senior retirement communities wouldn't give him much creative freedom.

So when his sister suggested he consider a senior community, he was skeptical—until he saw the opportunity it presented. “I looked at the elegant dining spaces and thought, this feels like the Ritz Carlton,” he recalls. “During my interview, they said, ‘If you're bored, change the menu.’ That kind of freedom and responsibility—it's unheard of in most kitchens.”



That's because today's seniors want to lead thriving, vibrant lives in retirement, he says, and that includes dining. Residents want dishes that rival those of top restaurants, he says, as well as staples like comfort food.

In his current role at [Watermark at San Jose](#), a new senior retirement community near Campbell, Chef Tony thrives on the challenge of creating a dining experience that is both innovative and deeply personal. For him, cooking in a senior retirement community goes beyond dining — it's also about building connections. “I walk the dining room every night,” he says. “The residents are my critics. They tell me what they love and what they don't want to see again. That feedback is invaluable.”

For Chef Tony, the responsibility of cooking for seniors is also deeply personal. Having lost his grandmother to Alzheimer's, he keeps her photo and a heartfelt poem by his desk for inspiration. “When things get stressful, I look at that picture and remember why I'm here,” he shares. Meals for memory care residents are crafted not just for nourishment but to bring comfort and familiarity, helping them feel connected and cared for.

Watermark also provides extraordinary living for their residents, he says through many other amenities, services and programs built around. But for Chef Tony, it's evident in the care he and the team put into the food they prepare.

"I have a sign that hangs in the kitchen and says, in this kitchen, the food is made with love. And as long as we're putting that in, people realize it."

*The Watermark at San Jose is a new community with assisted living and memory care opening in Fall 2024. For further information, you can visit [www.watermarkcommunities.com](http://www.watermarkcommunities.com), or call 669-321-5500.*