

# 10+ QUESTIONS: Chef Jake Pence

By Lisa Biedenbach. To suggest a member to profile for “10 Questions,” call Director of Operations Lisa Biedenbach, 513-217-4915, or email lbiedenbach@centralconnections.org.

## When did you know you wanted to be a chef?

When I made my first pretzel from scratch at age 10 or 11. As a kid, I always hung around in my mom’s and grandmother’s kitchens wanting to help.

## What is your work experience?

I worked as a sous chef at the Oscar Event Center at Jungle Jim’s, as part of a culinary team that prepared meals for weddings, corporate events, catering, and more. I specialized in large-capacity catering. I also worked at the high-end restaurants The Celestial in Cincinnati and MIA in Oxford. I trained at the Midwest Culinary Institute at Cincinnati State.

## What excites you about cooking and feeding people?

The instant recognition I get from cooking—seeing people eat and hearing them say what they like and don’t like about the food. Catering allows me to be creative while exploring limitations, such as budget and taste preferences.

## What are your specialties?

Classical Italian cuisine, American cuisine, and seafood. I make a great meatloaf wrapped in bacon. My signature seafood dish



*Jake Pence, Central Connections’ new Director of Dining Services and Executive Chef, oversees production of daily congregate meals, home delivered meals and meals for 5 off-sites in Middletown and Hamilton, and catered events on and off site. He directs the Dining Services staff.*

is tuna in a wasabi-cilantro sauce served with ginger-carrot sauce and sticky rice.

## What is your most important kitchen tool?

My Global chef’s knife made of Japanese steel. It distributes weight well and feels good in my hand. A good chef can replace any kitchen knife with one good chef’s knife.

## What is your favorite dish to prepare?

My espresso cheesecake.

## What is your top comfort food?

Macaroni and cheese. It is what my daughters eat all the time; it’s always comforting. I top my version with crushed Goldfish crackers.

## What is always in your refrigerator?

Steaks, American cheese, and smoked gouda.

## When you are not in the kitchen, where can you be found?

In the woods at my dad’s or four-wheeling, shooting, and bass fishing.

## What was your most challenging kitchen experience?

While working at Jungle Jim’s, I was part of a team that prepared breakfast for 3,000 guests. It took a lot of planning and different routines to serve the same quality meal to every guest.

## Where is home? Who is family?

I was born in Middletown, was raised in Monroe, and now live in West Elkton with my wife, Tabatha, and daughters Haedyn, 8, and Adelynn, 8 months.

## What is on your culinary bucket list?

I want to dine at Alinea in Chicago, a high-quality, experimental restaurant with a scientific and seasonal approach to cooking.

## What do you hope to bring to Central Connections’ meals and catering?

A positive attitude that encourages smiles and satisfaction among guests and staff. 🌿