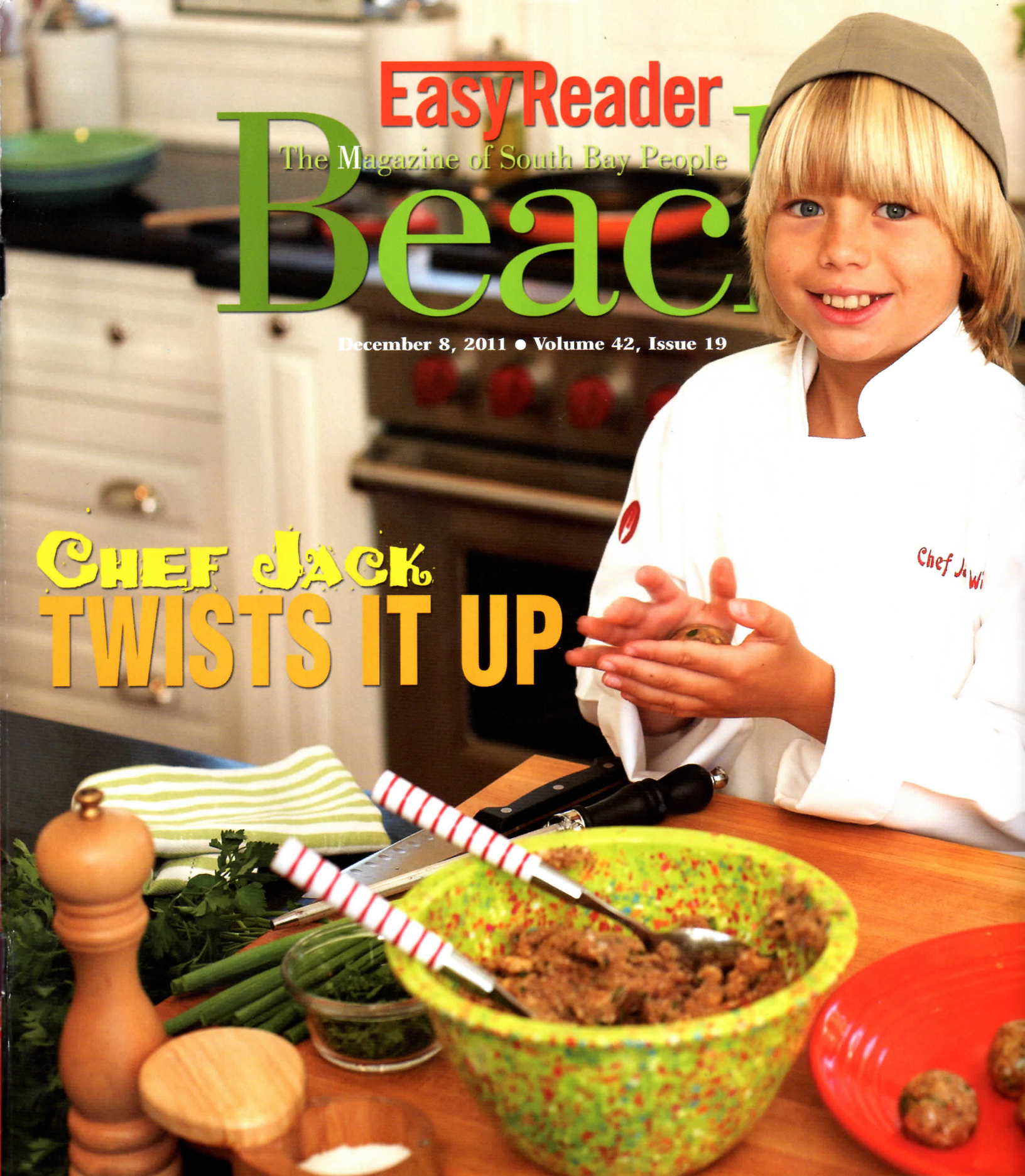


EasyReader The Magazine of South Bay People Beach

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CHEF JACK TWISTS IT UP



Atlas bronzed

Noah's art

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South Bay Gift Guide 2011

Easy Reader

Hermosa Beach Manhattan Beach Redondo Beach Hometown News

by Alene Tchekmedyan

At 15, Devin Alexander weighed nearly 200 pounds.

Wanting to lose weight, she tried dieting, but was unsuccessful. Many of her nights included coming home from school after being bullied and crying on the couch in her small-town, Pennsylvania home.

"I would sit there thinking, I'm either going to be miserable for life because I could never have a brownie again, or I'm going to be miserable for life because I'm going to be picked on forever," she said.

Alexander grew up in the kitchen - her two Italian grandmothers taught her family recipes and how to make homemade pasta - and she often cooked dinner for her entire family.

One day, she heard that cutting 100 calories from her daily diet could help her lose 10 pounds a year. "It was like, wait a second, you mean I can still have chicken parmesan, and if I just don't fry it, or if I grill the chicken and put full fat sauce and full fat cheese?" she asked herself at the time.

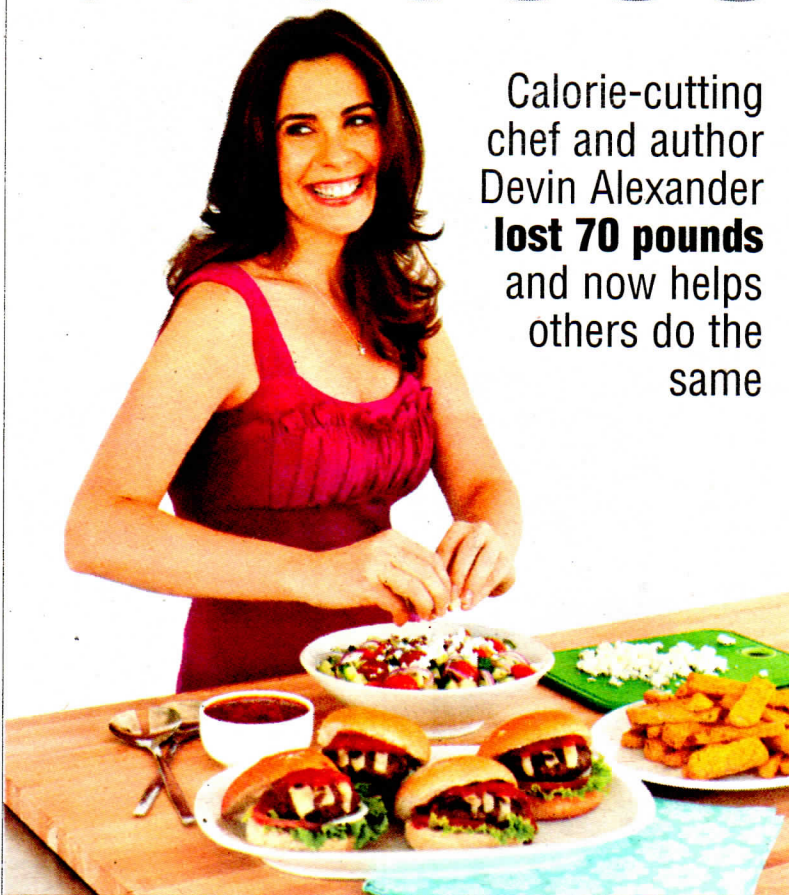
Alexander lost nearly 30 pounds that year with simple substitutions to her meals, she said, while sitting in the kitchen of her Manhattan Beach home, which overlooks the ocean. Alexander has converted all of her family recipes to incorporate her health-conscious style, while still preserving taste, she said.

She lives by the mantra: you don't have to deprive yourself of your favorite foods to be fit and healthy. "To me, if you're depriving yourself all day, you're not happy, so you're not healthy. Even if your body is smaller, you're mental state requires a little bit of chocolate here and there, in a good way," she said, with a giggle.

She's in the process of launching a line of 50-to-60-calorie brownies that she calls Devinly Delights. Flavors include chocolate orange, chocolate peanut butter, chocolate mint and chocolate raspberry. At any given time, she confessed, she has half a freezer of brownies at home. "It's just a food group around here," she said.

Since her teen years, Alexander has kept off 70 pounds.

Tasting Success



Calorie-cutting chef and author Devin Alexander lost 70 pounds and now helps others do the same

PHOTO COURTESY OF DEBORAH FEINGOLD

Devin Alexander just released her most recent cookbook, *The Biggest Loser Quick and Easy*, which is part of the New York Times bestselling series.

Experimenting in the kitchen has landed her television gigs and opportunities to cook for celebrities. For nine years, she owned a catering company, Café Renee, and for four she hosted "Healthy Decadence" on FitTV, up until last spring.

Alexander has also made appearances on NBC's *The Biggest Loser*, on which overweight contestants

compete to lose weight. In November, she released her eighth cookbook, *The Biggest Loser: Quick and Easy*, part of the New York Times bestselling book series.

Making the switch

After earning her bachelor's degree from Smith College in theater with a focus in script writing,

Alexander landed an apprenticeship in Hollywood in 1993. She soon learned that Los Angeles was filled with aspiring writers, and her big break could take a while.

So she volunteered to cook for celebrity charity events - she thought it would be a good way to make friends in a big city where she knew almost no one.

After continually receiving compliments on her healthy cooking, she said, Alexander figured she'd go to culinary school to buff up her resume and help her earn an income until her writing career took off. "This is what I'll do so I don't have to wait tables or be the struggling, stereotypical writer," she recalled thinking. She received her professional chef certification from Westlake Culinary Institute.

Nine years of lugging groceries into gorgeous homes for her catering company, Café Renee, grew old. "I'm like, 'I want this for myself,'" she said. So she took a job at Muscle and Fitness Magazine as the assistant to the editor in chief.

While Alexander's job description mostly entailed office work, she expanded her role at work to incorporate her healthy lifestyle, said Michelle Clark, a colleague of Alexander's at the magazine. The two worked out together during lunch and Alexander would often bring homemade recipes to the office for her coworkers to try. There, Clark was first exposed to Alexander's turkey meatballs - "Which are ridiculously good," Clark said.

Eventually, Alexander started publishing a healthy food column in the magazine, which turned into her first cookbook.

Clark recalled Alexander's kitchen experiments while working on "Fast Food Fix," her cookbook that contains healthy versions of fast foods. One day, Clark recalled, Alexander spent the day figuring out how to make frothy milkshakes without using ice cream. "She was injecting air into

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the milkshake - she had to figure out how much air to put in to get same frothiness that McDonald's gets," Clark recalled, with a laugh. "She's kind of a scientist and a chef."

"Fast Food Fix" is now a textbook at two high schools in the country.

Alexander's recipes can help a lot of people suffering from obesity, Clark said. "I think she gives options to people who don't know where else to turn."

A lasting impact

Alexander has worked as a private cooking instructor and is in the process of completing a certification program to be a weight loss coach.

Once, Alexander received a letter from a woman who wrote that her cookbooks saved the woman's marriage. "I used to secretly resent my husband because he could eat anything he wanted," Alexander recalled the letter saying. The woman wrote that her whole family, including herself, could enjoy Alexander's recipes. On top of that, the woman wrote that she lost 80 pounds.

Fan letters and success stories keep Alexander motivated. "I don't care if I'm a workaholic," she said. "There's no better feeling in the world than someone coming up to you and saying, 'You helped me so much, you literally saved my life.'"

John Baker, a 41-year-old man from Nashville, reached out to Alexander about two years ago on a social networking site. At the time, he weighed 530 lbs. and wanted to lose weight. "It pretty much came down to either lose weight or die an early death," Baker said.

The two kept in touch over the phone and online - she taught him how to cook for himself and be held accountable. "If I was struggling, I'd kind of want to hide away again, and she would call me, maybe I wouldn't want answer, but she'd keep calling me until I did answer," he said.

Since Alexander started coaching him, Baker has lost 214 lbs. His goal is to weigh less than 200 lbs. "She's been a big influence on helping me save my life," Baker said.

Alexander is now partnering with the Boys and Girls Club to start a project, "Kitchen Butterflies: Transforming Lives through Cooking," to help teenage girls lose weight without dieting. "I've always been obsessed with

food, and to be able to take that negative obsession and turn it into something positive that not only has helped me get healthy, but has helped other people, is just amazing," she said.

Tips for the holidays

To avoid gaining weight this holiday season, Alexander suggests simple tips to steer clear of overeating at holiday parties or while holiday shopping.

Before attending a holiday party, she said, eat a small meal. "There's so much garbage there, so better to eat before you go and not have your stomach make decisions for you," she said, adding that three to five small appetizers often have the same amount of calories you'd eat for one meal.

She also recommends scanning the room for your food options before picking on different foods as they come. "Without fail, you'll eat the Kobe beef burger, then along comes your favorite food and you're like, 'Well, I have to have that,'" she said.

Look for lean meats, deli platters and shrimp cocktails, she said. If you want to indulge on creamy cheeses, like Brie, "that's fine, but put it on crusty bread instead of buttery crackers," she said.

In terms of drinking, Alexander likes to fill champagne flutes with frozen grapes and then fill the glass with champagne. "In the end, you're picking out the champagne-soaked grapes and they taste great," she said. "You still feel social."

When holiday shopping, Alexander advises bringing snacks, like a bag of almonds or a protein bar. "Without fail, you're stuck in lines and you're cranky, so you wind up going to fast food," she said. **ER**

Sweet Potato No-Skins

16 ounces 1/2"-thick rounds light-skinned sweet potatoes (You'll need to start with about 1 1/2 pounds of potatoes in order to get 16 ounces of rounds. Try to choose potatoes that are roughly uniform in size. To create the rounds, peel your potatoes and cut both ends off. Then cut them into 1/2" thick rounds and measure out 16 ounces.)



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BIGGEST LOSER QUICK AND EASY COOKBOOK

- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 1/8 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/8 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne, or to taste
- 2 ounces finely shredded all-natural, low-fat Cheddar cheese
- 4 teaspoons all-natural bacon bits
- 4 teaspoons finely chopped scallions
- 2 tablespoons fat-free Greek yogurt (optional)

- 1.) Preheat the oven to 450°F. Line a baking sheet with nonstick foil.
- 2.) In a large glass or plastic mixing bowl, toss the potatoes and oil together until the potatoes are well coated.
- 3.) Place the potato rounds in a single layer on the prepared pan so they do not touch. Sprinkle the salt, garlic powder, and cayenne evenly over the top of the potatoes. Bake them for 10 minutes. Flip them and bake for 7 to 9 minutes longer, or until they are tender inside and starting to brown lightly on the outside.
- 4.) Push the potato rounds together so that they touch and you can easily top them in a single, even layer. First place the Cheddar, then the bacon bits, and then the scallions over the rounds. Bake for 2 to 3 minutes, or until the cheese is melted. Serve immediately with 1/2 teaspoon of the yogurt on top of each, if desired.

Makes four servings

Per serving: 141 calories, 7 g protein, 21 g carbohydrates (6 g sugar), 3 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 7 mg cholesterol, 4 g fiber, 283 mg sodium

SOURCE: THE BIGGEST LOSER QUICK AND EASY COOKBOOK



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