

# Reaching for the (Food Network) Stars

**For personal chef and APPCA member Katie Cavuto, living a green and healthy lifestyle isn't just personal, it's her passion and business.**

*By Lisa Shames*

Katie Cavuto may have plenty of things to be proud of, including her successful Philadelphia- based personal-chef business, Healthy Bites; her regular TV appearances on Fox; and, of course, her standing as a finalist on season five of "The Next Food Network Star." But what really makes this 30-year-old proudest is when her passion for living a healthy lifestyle connects with others. "To me that is as much an accomplishment as all the other things," says Cavuto. "Just being able to reach people and see success in their eyes is really cool." While at press time we don't know if Cavuto takes home the big prize - her own cooking show on the Food Network - she's already a star in our eyes.

APPCA: What made you want to go on the show?

Cavuto: Being both a dietician and personal chef, I've had a lot of opportunities in the Philadelphia area to do media segments. I've been doing regular segments on Fox for three-and- a-half years. I've learned that by having my own business, I have the opportunity to reach individuals and share what I'm passionate about and help people achieve their life-style goals and these media opportunities give me the chance to reach a much broader audience. So when I saw the opportunity to try out to ultimately have my own show on the Food Network, it was a no- brainer and the next logical step. Ultimately I want my own cooking show so what better place to start than on the Food Network, which is the cream of the crop when it comes to TV cooking shows?

APPCA: What did you learn from doing the show?

Cavuto: I learned a lot. The most important thing I learned is to be yourself. In the first couple of episodes I felt like I was trying to be what they wanted me to be. When you are focused on trying to be something other than who you are, you end up misrepresenting yourself and not showing your true potential. I definitely learned a lot about bringing my food to life in a culinary perspective. Even in the cooking classes that I teach on a day-to-day basis I'm now much more descriptive when I talk about the food I'm creating. I learned no matter how this all ends up I definitely want to have my own cooking show. Now that I've had the opportunity to experience what it is like, it's definitely something I will accomplish in my lifetime.

APPCA: What surprised you?

Cavuto: We worked really long days and it's not as glamorous as you might think. The difficulty of the challenges and the amount of pressure that you are under was really surprising too. Having watched the show numerous times in the past, I was that armchair judge looking at the television saying, 'Oh, I could have done that' or 'I can't believe they did that.' When you are in the experience you realize just how difficult it is. There is so much more pressure and the time frame of the challenges is a much different experience than my day-to-day cooking life. For example, in this last episode [episode 2] when I undercooked the lamb, people, including the judges, said, 'How could you serve that?!' But we didn't have that option. With 30 seconds left on the clock you either put in on the plate or you don't.

It is pretty intimidating, too. Having so much media exposure and being comfortable in front of the camera, I was confident going into it. But there's a whole other dimension of nerves that come into play when you have people that are actually judging and critiquing you on everything. It was not like your day-to-day life where you're going on Fox and doing a segment. That's very lighthearted. There is dimension of fear and nervousness that comes into it that you just don't experience in your life normally.

APPCA: How did your personal chef background come into play?

Cavuto: My experience as a personal chef helped me out a lot during the entire competition. Being a personal chef I really knowing how to cook for a multitude of clients. Some people have a lot of money to spend, others not so much. At the same time, not being in a rush on situations every day and having a set clientele was a hindrance sometimes. Some of the people that were in the restaurant end of the business had cooked in those pressure environments, whereas as a personal chef you're not really in those situations quite as often.

APPCA: How did you get interested in cooking?

Cavuto: Growing up my mom's parents owned a luncheonette. My dad's father was a butcher as well as an amazing gardener. I have fond memories of things he produced out of his garden. So I had a lot of culinary influences growing up. I was a gymnast for the majority of my younger years but unfortunately injured myself when I was in college. I didn't know what I want to do. I was working in a restaurant as a waitress and started helping out in the back of the house a little bit and I was having fun doing it. I thought it was an exciting challenge and I loved the creativity and everything else that the back of the house had to offer.

Then I went to Europe and really fell in love with food and culture. That solidified my love and passion for the industry. That's when I decided to go to culinary school. I went to Johnston and Wales and got a bachelor of science in culinary nutrition and an associate of science in culinary arts. From there I decided to get my master's in nutrition just to market myself a little bit better. Once I became registered dietician I worked in hospital for about three years. I worked clinically but I was really missing food. So about a year-and-a-half ago, I started my business, Healthy Bites, with the help of my husband, Andrew [Boyle], who is very entrepreneurial.

APPCA: Describe Healthy Bites.

Cavuto: Healthy Bites offers both nutritional and personal chef services. I try to facilitate long-term lifestyle changes in people's homes and teach them about healthy eating. I do that with group cooking classes in the home, as well with organic meal delivery service. I go grocery shopping with clients and I also do boutique catering.

My culinary point of view on the show is green cuisine. To me, that means supporting farm-to- table cuisine, getting processed foods off the table and getting people back into the kitchen, and focusing on seasonal and organic ingredients. I'm big proponent of having a backyard garden. Organic food can be very expensive in a grocery-store setting, so I teach my clients about growing it in their backyard, buying it at farmers markets and joining community supported agriculture programs. To me, it's about giving them all the tools they need and helping people of all income levels achieve these methods of living healthier lifestyles.

My husband and I laugh because sometimes I'm marketing against myself. I start people out on meal delivery but my goal is to get into homes and teach them to do it themselves, and how to plan ahead and organize their lives. I realize with meal delivery most people can't do it on a long- term basis. I recommend to every client that wants meal delivery to start with a nutritional consultation so they have the tools and information they need to do it on their own when the point comes when they can't afford it. To me the ultimate goal is more important than necessarily the business but it seems to work out. As one of my clients fazes out and starts cooking on their own, I have new clients coming in.

APPCA: What are some of the challenges of working as a personal chef?

Cavuto: You're not getting the same publicity as the restaurant chef would have just by having that retail front. You really have to be motivated to get out and market yourself. I've been fortunate having great marketing opportunities here in Philly, doing local TV segments, as well as having a lot of local write-ups in magazine and blogs. Obviously having the opportunity to be on the "The Next Food Network Star" is a phenomenal platform to market my business and the personal chef industry.

APPCA: What are some of the biggest misconceptions about the profession?

Cavuto: A lot of people think personal chefs might not be as accomplished as a restaurant chef. Realistically, it's just a choice of profession and how you want to use culinary degree. I'm a trained chef, as many restaurant chefs are, and to me the hours in the restaurant were not something I was interested in since I want to have a family and be able to explore other opportunities. To me making the decision to be a personal chef was about being able to utilize both the nutritional and culinary aspects of my education. As a restaurant chef, I didn't think I would be able to express what I'm passionate about and so much of that is teaching. Being a personal chef has allowed me to go into people's homes and reach individuals and help them in a way I wouldn't be able to do in a restaurant.

APPCA: Where do you find inspiration?

Cavuto: I actually find inspiration from my clients. I learned so much from their day-to-day struggles and I use their struggles to help other people achieve the same thing. The seasons, local farmers markets and my backyard garden also inspire me. I get so excited to use foods that are in seasonal. That's something I try and instill in all my clients as well.

When I hang out with my clients in their homes and cooking with them, it's such a friendly environment. I feel like I'm hanging out with good friends in the kitchen. As I'm doing that I can gauge how much information a client will be able to process. I think it's individual, based on each client's income level and just where they are at in the process in being healthier. It's all us all about taking baby steps. As far as incorporating some fresh ingredients and organic and buying local, my clients are all receptive to that. If nothing more, I try to get everyone to start an herb garden because that's a great place to start as far as having your own backyard garden. They find a lot of benefits from doing it.

APPCA: What kind of advice can you offer for those seeking to become personal chefs?

Cavuto: You definitely have to be a driven person. It's not the type of career you can take on if you're not ready to work hard and promote yourself. When you have your own business, you have good and bad months. It's all about planning ahead and understanding the ups and down. One of the best things that I've learned out of this whole process is you have to give to get a return. You need to get yourself out there and do a lot of promotional events, some of which might be volunteer hours. That's the best way to share your passion and business. I found that by getting involved in my community and non-profit events have been a successful way to grow my business and are a great way to show people who I am and what I love.

APPCA: What do you have planned for the future?

Cavuto: To continue to grow Healthy Bites and to have my show. You'll just have wait and see if it's on the Food Network or not.

***Editor's note:** Katie Cavuto did not ultimately become the "Next Food Network Star," but APPCA executive director and founder Candy Wallace lauds her drive and the courage it took to audition for a national TV show and stick with her commitment to win right up to reaching the level of being one of the last five finalists. According to Wallace, Cavuto's appearance and effort in this much-loved cooking show elevated the awareness and perception of personal chefs markedly. APPCA is extremely proud of Cavuto, Wallace stressed.*

*For more information on Healthy Bites, visit [www.healthybitesdelivery.com](http://www.healthybitesdelivery.com)*