



ROBERT CASILLAS/DAILY BREEZE

Michael Limas is director of corporate development at El Segundo-based New York Food Co., which caters to clients aboard private aircraft.

## Caterer focuses on high-flying appetites

**EL SEGUNDO:** New York Food Co. gets off the ground with its new in-flight service, Chefs With Altitude.

By Muhammed El-Hasan  
DAILY BREEZE

Last August, Michael Limas took a catering order that included West Coast Italian focaccia sandwiches, Petaluma buttermilk-marinated golden chicken salad, Northwest smoked salmon and caviar potato flowers.

The food was standard for New York Food Co.

But it was unusual that a Secret Service agent opened each box of food delivered by the El Segundo catering business. And the food went on a plane parked at Long Beach Airport with then-presidential candidate John Kerry on

board.

"It was exciting," recalled Limas, director of corporate development at New York Food. "It was someone who could possibly end up as president of the United States."

The order also was significant in that it helped launch the company's new in-flight catering service, Chefs With Altitude, dubbed CWA.

"It was huge. It leap-frogged us into thinking, 'Hey, we can do this,'" vice president Jim Wharton said of the Kerry order. "It was our first plane we went onto."

On Monday, Limas received the first batch of 1,000 newly printed copies of the CWA menu that he'll use to market the new service.

CWA plans to service charter and private planes from six airports including LAX, Long Beach,

CHEFS/C3



Larry Flentie, executive chef at New York Food Co., prepares garnish for an hors d'oeuvres platter. Packaging is the key in catering for airplanes, he says.

# CHEFS: Group's customer base could be huge

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Santa Monica, Burbank, Van Nuys and John Wayne.

Since that first in-flight job and another order in September when Kerry's plane stopped at LAX, New York Food has filled about 40 catering orders for aircraft including some flying professional sports teams, said Limas, who directs the new service.

CWA could draw on a huge customer base.

Mercury Air LAX, a so-called fixed base operation, provides fuel and other services to an average of 25 charter and private planes at the hub airport, Mercury operations manager Lorcan Kelly said.

"We've used them in the past to do some of our office catering," Kelly said of New York Food. "If their aviation food business is anything like their other food, I think they'll do very well."

New York Food Co. caters about 600 weddings a year and 65-75 corporate functions each weekday.

The company also runs two of the South Bay's most popular wedding venues, the La Venta Inn in Palos Verdes Estates and Verandas in Mahattan Beach.

Its clients include Boeing Co., Northrop Grumman Corp. and Torrance-based Toyota Motor Sales USA. The in-flight service is simply an extension of that corporate business, Limas said.

"The food the executives now eat in their boardrooms will go into charter planes, and they'll be able to eat it at 41,000 feet," Limas said.

The in-flight menu is a hybrid of the company's menus for corporate functions and special events such as weddings. "This menu here is for people where first class isn't good enough," Limas said.

New York Food has no immediate plans to expand its facility or hire more employees, although some drivers and chefs may be given more work hours, Wharton said.

The company's spacious kitchen

could go to a round-the-clock schedule if the in-flight business takes off, Wharton said.

Catering for airplanes differs from that for corporate or special events mainly in the packaging, New York Food executive chef Larry Flentie said. Some planes have limited storage and can't accommodate large platters, or have microwaves instead of conventional ovens, Flentie said.

The concept of in-flight catering arose during a company strategy meeting in 2002. The idea had been slowly percolating at New York Food when the Kerry order came.

During the company's research, Limas, Wharton, Flentie and co-owners Joe and Louise Lohman attended the National Business Aviation Association conference in Las Vegas, where 87 planes were parked at the Henderson Executive Airport as part of that event.

"We walked through every single one and checked them out," Limas said.