

Nome NACTEC

Hi, I'm Michael, your cultural alaskan chef.

Today I'd like to share with you one of my experiences working at the Northwestern Alaska Career and Technical Center located near the high school in Nome Alaska.

Nome is one of the larger villages on Norton Sound. It has a fairly large footprint and a population of over 4000. You may have caught glimpses of the town on TV while watching gold miners on the Bering Sea.

On one occasion I remember a reindeer riding around in the back of a pick-up truck. I managed to come across this reindeer one day at Nomes Alaska Commercial (AC) store parking lot as I was shopping for NACTEC house where I studied for my teaching credential and doubled as a house parent for 26 students.

Nome is a more typical type of town consisting of bars, restaurants, stores, hospital and even a city gym with a small bowling alley. It has an airport with an Alaska Airlines hub as well as a number of small private based air carriers. There is also a famous pizza place where some of the gold miners hang out called Airport Pizza. It serves breakfast lunch and dinner. It also has a small bar that serves some interesting beers.

NACTEC usually began its sessions with a dinner from the local Subway restaurant that also had a small movie theater attached to it.

The house was split into 14 rooms upstairs and 14 rooms downstairs. The upper rooms are where our female students slept and a woman house parent residing in room 14. My room was on the first floor where I typically watched over 13 male students. I slept during the day after supervising breakfast and then woke to help with lunch and dinner then finding time in the evening to attend classes with University of Alaska Southeast on my computer.

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On this particular occasion, Doug Walrath, NACTEC Director invited me to cook for the advisory board members from the 15 villages where our students came from. Doug was also expecting a visit from our governor and a woman senator. The event was supposed to last less than a week, so Doug asked me to come a day early to create a menu and to shop at Nomes A/C to cover breakfast, lunches and dinners.

It was quite an experience and a bit different from running a restaurant like I had done while living in California. Some of the items I had planned for were not available so I had to make adjustments. Doug made things as easy as possible and bought subway sandwiches for the first night and an evening at Airport Pizza. When I got to NACTEC, Doug and I connected and I showed him what I had for a menu. We made adjustments because a number of other people had decided to show up. Our school superintendent and an advisor/counselor (Carl White) decided to attend for one day for the dignitaries.

I shopped at the A/C and obtained what I figured to be enough food for 5 days. A day later our guests began showing up and the conference began. We had about 16 rooms occupied for our guests. Some of the guests had relatives nearby and I found that those folks spent the night occasionally after the daily conferences ended.

Everything went really well and before I knew it the conference was on its second to last day. Our woman senator made a short visit and then left without sampling my cuisine. The morning of the day before our board members left I began the preparation for serving red enchiladas. I began the night before cooking cups of small grained white rice.

The first thing to prep was the red enchiladas. I sautéed ground beef adding some diced onions and some enchilada spice straight from the seasoning foil I had purchased. Next on the list was preparing the Mexican rice that I had

cooked the night before. To do this I took a large 5 quart pot added some cooking oil and began frying half the white rice adding some whole corn and chopped scallions. I added Mexican spice from another foil bag and stirred. After I felt the rice was browned and spiced to my liking, I did the next batch in the same way after taking the first batch and putting it in a large pyrex dish. With the rice completed, I could concentrate on the enchiladas. The ground beef had cooled and I could continue with heating about 30 ten inch tortillas in the oven at low heat 170 degrees F. I grated a pound of jack cheese and opened large cans of red enchilada sauce. I began assembling the enchiladas by placing a warmed tortilla on a large plate. I took the enchilada sauce and added some to my baking dish coating it thoroughly. I added a 1/4 cup of the ground meat and added just enough green chilis from a large can and then added some jack cheese. I repeated this process until all the tortillas were filled and in baking pans. I increased the heat of the oven to 350. Then I covered the entire baking pans with the rest of the red sauce. The enchiladas were covered with a sheet of foil and baked for 30 minutes taking the foil off the last 10 minutes. I checked the temperature for 165 degrees before removing then from the oven. While the enchiladas were baking I opened large cans of refried beans and dumped them into a large cooking pot. I seasoned them with salt, dried red pepper and cumin to taste and then cooked them covered until serving temperature, stirring them occasionally. This became the meal for the evening and I served a little more than half due to some of the board members leaving in taxis to meet up with relatives. I quickly stored the leftovers in the refrigerator incase I needed them the next day.

The next day I decided to use these leftovers added to green enchiladas for a change up to the previous days Mexican food.

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I used the same process using 30 ten inch flour tortillas. For the green enchiladas I needed to shred more jack cheese and added lots of green chilis to each tortilla. Less than half of the beans and rice had been consumed the previous day so that part was easy to re-heat.

About noon Doug called me and announced that governor Parnell had showed up and would be joining us for lunch. I informed Doug that I had just finished preparing green enchiladas and if I had a half an hour It would be ready to serve the governor and advisors. I could feel Doug smiling on the phone and replied that he loved enchiladas.

The day was a complete success and the governor was able to dine with us and still make his flight out prior to a large storm approaching Nome. I was included in a picture with the governor and advisors and have included this picture. You will see me standing just behind governor Parnell and next to the director Doug Walrath in the back row.

Our new year is already rapidly passing and I'd like to wish all a prosperous and wonderful time over the future months.

This is Michael your cultural alaskan chef