



UN General Assembly dignitaries are asking a lot when it comes to dining.



Power hungry

A New York chef reveals the ridiculous demands of diva diplomats

By JOHNNY OLEKSINSKI

NEW Yorkers' commutes, lunch breaks and nights on the town have been shaken up this week by the United Nations General Assembly. But behind closed doors, an even more chaotic scene is unfolding: Kitchen staffers are frantically working to please the picky palates of the hundreds of foreign delegates, world leaders and royalty who have descended on Manhattan.

"Everybody grants every wish, every whim, every whimsy to the heads of state, the delegations and to the parties that fly in on a moment's notice," Willis Loughhead, the executive chef at the InterContinental New York Barclay hotel, tells The Post. For the past 30 years, Loughhead has worked at many of the city's most luxurious hotels, often catering to the over-the-top needs of high-powered dignitaries and heads of state. This week at the Barclay, he will feed at least 16 foreign delegations staying at the hotel for the UNGA — and likely many more who drop by for a snack, or a feast.

"They really expect the same food that they have at their palaces," he says.

A few years ago, a large royal party came to the Barclay and asked for an Italian spread to be served at 3 a.m. — and not just some warm spaghetti and a chafing dish of meat-

balls. The smorgasbord boasted a risotto station presented in a hollowed-out Parmesan wheel, gorgeous pastas in copper pots and bountiful salad and meat options.

But, just as the chef was about to feed his guests, disaster struck.

"I realized I didn't have my wedding ring on," he recalls. "I finally found it in the panzanella."

"Imagine if you were a prince or a king, and some chef's ring was in your mouth," he continues. "I couldn't live with myself!"

To ensure a genuine taste of home, often guests will travel with their whole pantry on their private jets.

A handler for a group of foreign dignitaries once called ahead to the Ritz-Carlton and told Loughhead, "We have a truck coming with products we want you to use from our country."

"So I'm thinking a Toyota pickup or a Ford Econoline van," he recalls.

But the high rollers' "truck" turned out to be an 18-wheeler stuffed with oranges, beef, vegetables, teas and tea serving pieces from their home country in Asia, all meant for the group, which had booked an entire floor of the hotel.

"The amount of crazy ex-

CRAZIEST REQUESTS

- A \$12,000 truffle!
- Italian buffet at 3 a.m.!
- A semi-truckload of foreign foods!

pense to fly something in ... It's impressive," he says.

This past Sunday, a group of five diners here for the UN told Loughhead, "We'll have coffee and tea, maybe some light tea sandwiches" — an uncommonly modest request.

Within 15 minutes, however, the suite was packed with 45 people. The light sandwich order gradually increased, until finally a request came for a manned raw bar on the periphery of the room, boasting 150 shucked oysters and lobsters. Unfazed, the chef said, "game on!"

"They're spending exactly what they want to spend," he says. "My job is to make sure it's flawless and quick."

One of Loughhead's big-

gest spenders ever arrived on a Christmas Eve when a king and his 15-person party came to the Plaza. A handler approached the chef and told him "the king would like Kobe beef, white truffles, caviar, a very fine risotto and lobster." It was Friday night, and no stores were open.

"White truffles are out of season," Loughhead told the handler. "Would you like truffle oil, truffle salt or jarred truffles?" But the helper wouldn't budge. Thinking fast on his feet, Loughhead reached out to "Truffle Mike," his go-to source for the costly, musty delicacy "who travels the city with truffles in his backpack." Mike was at Daniel, Daniel Boulud's Midtown East restaurant.

"I need everything you have in your backpack," Loughhead said.

"I only have one, and it's the size of a grapefruit — and it costs \$12,000."

"No problem," the chef said. "Let's do it."

At the same time, Loughhead's Kobe beef guy sent a 22-year-old intern to open up his store. Dressed in a short frock en route to a Christmas party, the intern trekked over to the hotel lugging two large sides of the costly meat.

The meal was ultimately served at 11 p.m. The \$12,000 truffle, the Kobe beef, the caviar and lobster were charged to the king's room bill.

"Is he happy?" the beleaguered chef asked the king's handler.

"Oh, he's ecstatic. He liked the meal so much, he'll have it again tomorrow!"

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