Family and Career - I Cater to Both

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“All I ever did as a child was stir the gravy and mash the potatoes.”
Now Mrs. Barnett serves from seven to a thousand persons at once.

by Donna Schneider
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Family and Career

If “I’m so busy” is your constant plea, slow your hurried pace for a breather and compare notes with Mrs. Reid Barnett, a woman to whom busyness is a byword.

The working day of Mrs. Barnett is filled brimful with the details of her home catering service—baking scores of pies, answering phone calls, decorating wedding cakes. And the kitchen is filled brimful of boys, five of them under 11 years old, to be exact.

Mrs. Barnett developed a catering service in her home in Ames when her growing family left too little time for a regular job. “My business has grown as rapidly as my family,” exclaims the vivacious 34-year-old blond. A wail from upstairs interrupts her, and she runs lightly up the staircase of her relaxed, spacious home, returning with the youngest son, five month old Clifford.

“This is number five,” she explains, “the one who demanded that I limit my catering service to weddings.” Until this year, Mrs. Barnett did catering for every imaginable type of occasion, from baking pies for busy neighbors to managing an insurance company open house for 1000 guests.

Mrs. Barnett has found her business the perfect answer to her desire to earn extra money while staying home with her family. “Denby, who’s 11; Wendel, 7; Anthony, 6; and my husband even help with my business occasionally,” says Mrs. Barnett. “And
Later To Both

Timothy—well, he's a typical two-year-old, but he's well-behaved and happy in the dining room while I cook. I put folding gates on the doors so I can keep an eye on him while keeping him out of the pans.

A catering career never occurred to Mrs. Barnett during her college days. She was graduated from Iowa State in March 1944, with a degree in education. After teaching three months to finish out a term in high school, she joined the Marine Corps. Doris became a "Mrs." in August 1945, while still in the Marines. She and Reid had dated each other in high school and in college before he quit to join the Marines.

When Reid decided to return to Iowa State to complete his education, Mrs. Barnett settled down to life as a civilian homemaker, caring for their new son, Denby. But homemaking alone didn't offer sufficient challenge to the energetic Mrs. Barnett. "I was anxious to develop some outside interests," she says, "so I decided to take some courses at the college just for fun."

Mrs. Barnett began work on her master's degree in institution management in 1947. As graduation time drew near, so did the birth of Mrs. Barnett's second son. "My instructor said I should have gotten an "A" in time management," she quips. "I took the oral examinations for my thesis, hurried off to the hospital to have Wendel, and came back for December commencement, all within three weeks!"

Wendel was soon followed by son number three, but Mrs. Barnett didn't give up thoughts of a career. She worked for five months at the Memorial Union, first as supervisor of the cafeteria, and then as supervisor of the Oak Room.

The next year, the institution management department had very few graduate students, and Mrs. Barnett responded to its frantic SOS. For a year, she assisted in the quantity cookery laboratories and took over the teaching when regular instructors were absent.

"I was lucky to have such good working hours," said Mrs. Barnett. "They dovetailed exactly with the child development nursery school hours." But after Timothy arrived Mrs. Barnett gave up her job, fearing that she might neglect her family.

In spite of her expanding family, Mrs. Barnett still wanted a career. She struck upon the idea of opening a catering business in her home when she heard the institution management department was planning to sell their old three-deck oven. She planned to set up the oven in the basement and do cooking for others.

The oven was sold to a church organization before Mrs. Barnett had a chance to ask about it, but her

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dream was too vivid to squelch by this time. Her
first opportunity came when Lenore Sullivan of the
institution management department suggested to an
Ames woman that she ask Mrs. Barnett to cater her
daughter's wedding reception.
This first wedding reception came off successfully,
and Mrs. Barnett was launched on her at-home
career. She bought a two-oven range and put ad­

tishments in the Ames paper.
"I sold mainly desserts for parties or bridge clubs
at first," says Mrs. Barnett. Hot rolls, pies, cakes
and fried chicken were in great demand. "My fam­
ily is satisfied with heated rolls from the freezer",
says Mrs. Barnett, "but I always sell my rolls fresh
from the oven."
From individual orders for party or family des­
serts, Mrs. Barnett went on to cater entire dinners.
She cooked most of the food at home and took it to
the home where the dinner was being served. For
very large dinners, she hired a helper to do dishes.
"One of my best customers gave several buffet din­
ers, entertaining up to 70 guests," says Mrs. Barnett.
"My 18 cubic foot freezer is my salvation," she ex­
claims. "I cook as many things as possible ahead
and store them in the freezer."

Remodels Kitchen

Until last year Mrs. Barnett conducted her busi­
ness from a kitchen typical of the large houses built
in the 1920's, with no unusual conveniences. Last
year she remodeled her kitchen and bought a heavy­
duty mixer and another refrigerator with her cater­
ing profits.

Mrs. Barnett's fabulous cooking leads many custo­
mers to claim she must have been born with a silver
spoon in her hand. "I'm not a born cook," Mrs.
Barnett insists. "All I ever did as a child was stir
the gravy and mash the potatoes. Chocolate cake
was the only thing I could make." She says her con­
sistent success comes from conscientious recipe-follow­
ing. The majority of Mrs. Barnett's recipes come
from Lenore Sullivan's "What to Cook for Company"
and "Quantity Food File."

Uses Cake Mixes

Because Mrs. Barnett received so many requests to
cater wedding receptions, she took an adult educa­
tion course in cake decorating in Des Moines. Mrs.
Barnett caters approximately one wedding a week
now. Although her wedding cakes reap myriads of
compliments, she smiles when she reveals her for­
mula. "A home economics major at one of my wed­
dings exclaimed that she'd never tasted better wed­
ding cake," says Mrs. Barnett. "If she only knew!"
Mrs. Barnett experimented with all types of cake
recipes and found that cake mix made the best wed­
ding cakes.

Transportation to the church is Mr. Barnett's de­
partment. He carries the cake on a bread board on
the back seat of the car. Denby does his share by
helping with pots and pans when they pile up after
a day of cooking. Timothy and Wendel set the
table for meals, and Anthony helps around the house
and yard.

Besides doing catering, Mrs. Barnett helps with the
bookkeeping in her husband's ceramic tile and
masonry company. "I'm used to figures after keep­
ing records for my catering business," says Mrs. Bar­
nett. "I figure the cost of my ingredients and double
it for price, tripling it if the work is extremely time­
consuming."

Mrs. Barnett plans to restrict her business to wed­
ding receptions until the children are older. She
says that as a cateress she can get substantial profits
by concentrating her work in an evening of baking
and decorating after the children are in bed. She
adds enthusiastically, "Catering weddings is a perfect
business for the homemaker who wants to combine
family and career!"