

# SHS graduates taste culinary success

By Jodi Schneider McNamee  
Correspondent

Wil and Kris Hansen met during the seventh grade at Sisters Middle School and became good friends, and by senior year during high school they were dating. They were both in the Sisters High School graduating class of 2003 and in 2006, they exchanged marriage vows.

This summer, White Pepper, the Hansen's Pacific Northwest catering business based out of Portland, was voted number-one caterer in Portland by *Oregon Bride Magazine*.

The highly anticipated annual awards honor Oregon's top wedding professionals, voted on by brides and grooms and their peers.

Research shows that the person you marry can have a dramatic impact on job satisfaction and career success. The Hansens discovered the key ingredients for a successful team.

Kris, with a degree in interior design, contributes to White Pepper using her expertise to display food in elegant style. And as a chef, Wil works with local farms to create custom menus featuring fresh, local, and seasonal ingredients.

In 2009 the Hansens moved from Tennessee to Portland where Wil kick-started his culinary career at Western Culinary Institute in downtown Portland.

"We got some schooling under our belt and lived in Tennessee for about 6 years after graduating high school," Wil said.

"Portland is where our passion for food really started to reveal itself with accessibility to the amazing food culture and incredible seasonal farmers markets. Portland is a booming culinary industry," Kris explained.

After graduating from the culinary school, Hansen landed an internship at Laurelhurst Market, that had just been named one of *Bon Appetit's* best new restaurants in the United States.

He continued to work for the restaurant and other eateries owned by Laurelhurst Market. But Hansen quickly realized the he had a desire for his own business using his own culinary creations.

"It was a marriage between his management/operational skills and a creativity with seasonal foods," Kris said. "Catering felt like a natural fit for us as a newly growing family. We had our first daughter in 2012 and with our own business we could start slowly on the side while Wil kept a day job at the restaurant."

As White Pepper grew, Hansen made the plunge and left his restaurant position to be able to operate their business full time.

"Catering is just something I really enjoy. It's fun for me to plan events in advance and put menus together tailored to what my clients want," said Wil.

Eighty-five percent of White Pepper's business is catering weddings.

"We both love weddings just because there is such joy during that time and people are glad to be there, it's a fun celebration," Wil said. "Food helps perpetuate the celebration."

**“ To see all our hard work come to this point of recognition was an incredible feeling. — Wil Hansen**

With a staff of about 30 employees that work full- and part-time, White Pepper has grown a bit in the four years since conception. The Hansens rent space in a commissary kitchen and do some of the preparation work there and then bring the food to an event. White Pepper also has a cargo van with a trailer full of equipment to cook on site so they can preserve the quality of the food.

"We are at the wedding from start to finish," Wil told



PHOTO PROVIDED

Wil and Kris Hansen have built a successful catering business in Portland.

*The Nugget*. "We are the first ones to arrive and the last ones to leave."

Last March the Hansens found out White Pepper was nominated for No. 1 caterer in Portland and attended the annual awards show.

"We were very excited to find out we won over three other caterers at the end of the ceremony! To see all our hard work come to this point of recognition was an incredible feeling," said Wil.

"Our goal is to keep creating wonderful experiences for clients, and one way that we do that is to focus on local

foods by supporting local farms. We also focus on taking care of our staff in the midst of this crazy industry that is catering, as well as providing impeccable service for our clients."

The Hansens come to Sisters at least twice a year to visit Kris's parents.

"In our five-year plan we'd like to open up a Central Oregon division of White Pepper. We feel like there is a similar market for this in Bend and Sisters," Wil said.

To find out more about White Pepper visit [www.whitepepperpx.com](http://www.whitepepperpx.com).

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