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Serving Sailors from Reagan's Kitchen

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There are more than 15,000 meals served daily aboard the Navy's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier, USS Ronald Reagan (CVN 76), feeding more than 4,300 Sailors and consuming around 1,400 gallons of milk, 7,000 pounds of lettuce and over 30,000 pounds of chicken every month.

Culinary Specialist Seaman Apprentice (CSSA) Joseph Abella turns these raw materials into the fuel needed to sustain our shipmates and mission. He described how the daily tasks of a culinary specialist go beyond just serving, and how success is a team sport.

"I try to be a team player," said Abella. "When everybody cooperates, we do our best to help each and every one of us. I try to help someone who needs it."

The galley is a critical element of Reagan's daily underway operations. Reagan operates 24 hours a day, and so does the galley. Abella explained how Sailors are often unable to make meal times due to watch or other mission requirements and the importance of to-go meals.

"Everyone needs to eat," said Abella. "We always need to be thinking ahead and be prepared. Providing people with hotplates is just part of being a good shipmate."

From providing hotplates for watchstanders to passing medical inspections, the culinary well-being of the crew is their highest priority. There are many other facets to the CS career, and one

of those is providing service to onboard guests. Lt. j.g. Patrick Bolton, Reagan's wardroom officer, learned quickly that Abella had a knack for this type of duty.

“Right out of the gate when he came into the wardroom he was willing to learn and willing to take on the charge. We're always looking for Sailors who are motivated, and he certainly has that trait,” said Bolton. “He's thirsty to learn whatever it is in the galley, and the fact that his attitude is awesome really leads me to think that he's going to be a great addition to the wardroom. That's how we are directly supporting Reagan's mission, having people that are motivated and people that are ready to learn.”

Being a forward-deployed aircraft carrier, Reagan caters to distinguished visitors and large-scale receptions. Culinary specialists can be considered ambassadors of sorts, providing an atmosphere and experience that ensures good relations with our allies and partners. Bolton explained the role culinary specialists, and CSSA Abella in particular, play when cultivating these partnerships.

“Part of our mission for distinguished visitors and guests is that Ronald Reagan needs to be a good host,” said Bolton. “The fact that I can rely on him to cater to that mission so that we can be deemed a good host for our allies and all of these distinguished visitors is why he's one of my key players for these events. We want the world to know that Reagan is a great place to visit.”

When a Sailor receives their meal on the mess decks or in the wardroom, they only see a plate of food. What they don't see is the long hours scrubbing the galley, chopping vegetables, grilling proteins and baking breads. Though the days may sometimes seem endless, Abella understands that the strength of the ship is his shipmates.

“I like taking care of people,” said Abella. “I like giving them what they need and offering what we have to them. I want to be a good shipmate.”

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