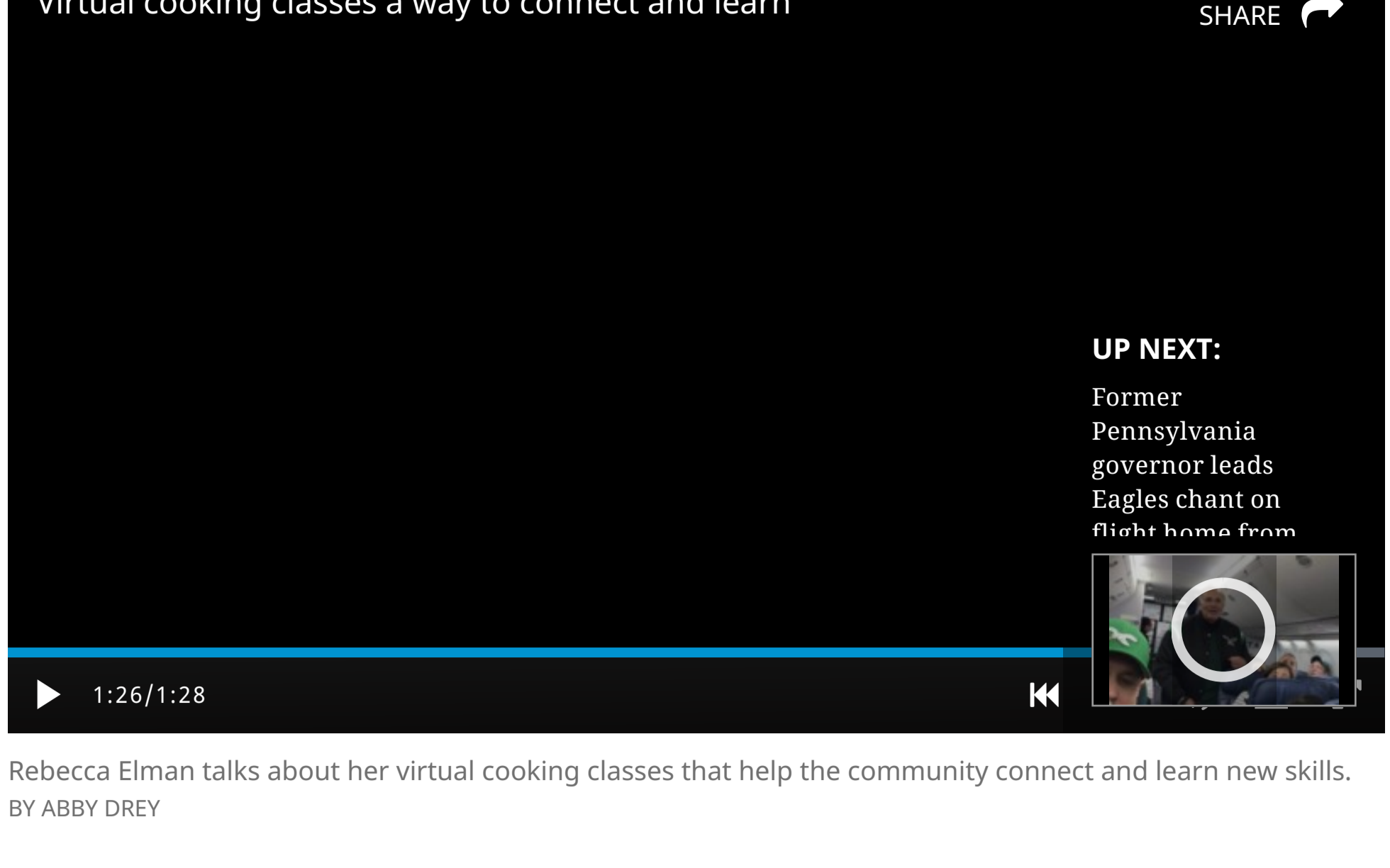


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Boalsburg chef teaching online cooking classes to provide a 'safe and fun' activity amid pandemic

BY HOLLY RIDDLE
SEPTEMBER 20, 2020 08:00 AM, UPDATED SEPTEMBER 21, 2020 03:42 PM

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Rebecca Elman talks about her virtual cooking classes that help the community connect and learn new skills. BY ABBY DREY

After moving from New York City to State College a little over a year ago, Rebecca Elman began teaching cooking classes at RE Farm Cafe, but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and changed the way people come together for food and fun, Elman realized she needed to likewise change the way she shares her extensive culinary experience with the world.

A personal chef in New York City with additional experience working at the James Beard Foundation and as a recipe tester for cookbooks, Elman has the cooking chops. She just needed the right platform for sharing her expertise. As so many businesses and organizations have during the pandemic, she turned to Zoom. Now, Elman is still teaching culinary skills and recipes to classes full of home cooks, just in a pandemic-proof format through her website, [TheHiddenHostess.com](#).

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"The cooking classes are not like a typical cooking class. What I would normally do for a cooking class is, there would be a theme or there would be a four or five dishes and we'd split up into groups and cook that way. This is more focused. We're going to make one dish together or focus on one lesson together, one technique together. Classes will be about 40 to 50 minutes, so not too long," she explains.

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A week ahead of a class session, Elman sends participants their ingredient and equipment list. Most ingredient prep and cooking takes place during the class period, so there's minimal preparation required ahead of time.

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"Then, it's all through Zoom and we go through the recipe together live, cooking at the same time," she said. "I've done a few classes so far, and it's really interactive. Everyone can ask questions. I can see everyone's food. They can see my food. I have a few angles in my kitchen, so you can see me and what I'm cooking on the stove. It's as interactive as it can be, while not being together."

So far, Elman has taught a series of risotto classes, and she's offering a Quick and Easy Sauces class on Sept. 27, and a three-part gluten-free cooking course over three weeks in October. Most classes are limited to eight to 10 participants, to keep the class intimate and manageable. Participants so far, Elman recounts, have been a mix of individuals who simply want to enjoy an activity together while social distancing, as well as home cooks looking to enhance their skills in the kitchen.

"I think that's kind of my idea, especially coming into the fall and winter when we're going to be inside more. You can do an activity together that's safe and fun, and see people you wouldn't or can't normally see," Elman said. "I'm trying to build something where people can enjoy doing an activity that they can't do together anymore."

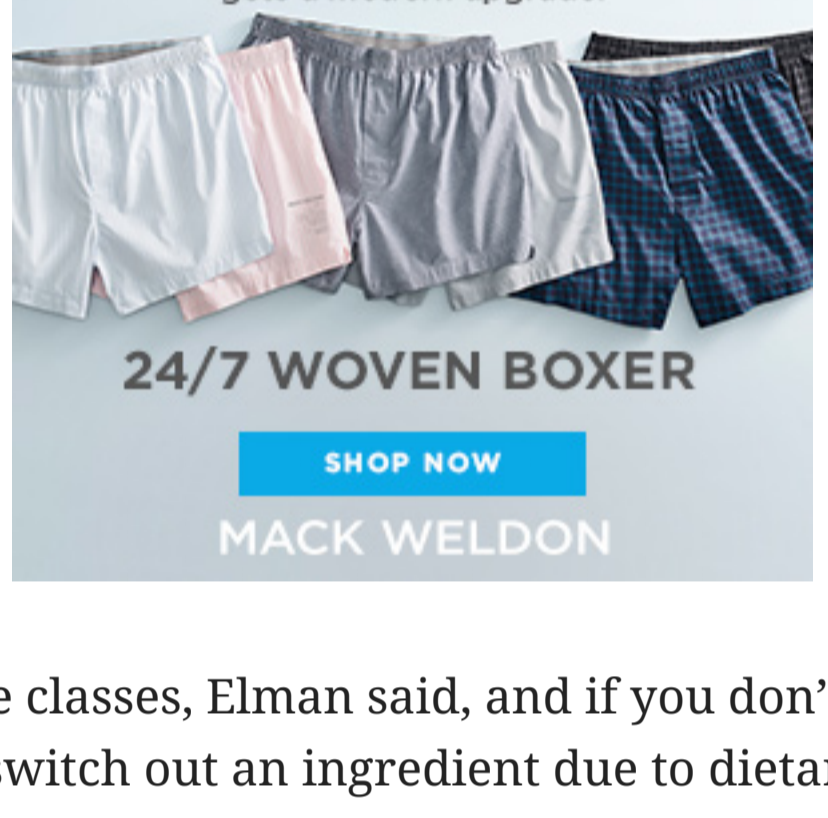
For friends who want to reserve a private class, that's also an option, with customized menus and class topics.

"People are learning new things they didn't know before, and it's a fun activity to do on a weeknight or a weekend, that they wouldn't normally do," Elman said. "I try to have my classes set up at 5 o' clock, so we're making the dish and then you can have it for dinner at 6 with your family."

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No prior cooking knowledge is required for the classes, Elman said, and if you don't have a certain ingredient on hand, or need to switch out an ingredient due to dietary needs, that's OK. She calls the class environment "pretty easy going."

In addition to October's gluten-free cooking series, which is \$70 total for the series of three classes, Elman is also planning a Thanksgiving series in November, where participants can learn how to cook and prep classic Thanksgiving dishes, leading up to Thanksgiving Day. She also has plans to add more risotto classes and possibly seafood and more gluten-free courses to the calendar.

In the future, Elman would like to create an in-person cooking instruction space on her property in Boalsburg, which includes a historic 1804 tavern. But for now, she's enjoying the opportunity to be "together" with her pupils, even if they can't all be physically in the same cooking space.

"It's just fun to be able to teach again and see people and interact. I'm grateful that we're still able to do that, even though it's in a different way," she said. "Cooking is something we all do, whether you like it or not. It's something that's a necessity in order to eat. To make it fun and to teach new skills or techniques to people who are excited to learn them, is really gratifying."



Chef Rebecca Elman teaches virtual cooking classes in her home kitchen in Boalsburg. ABBY DREY ADREY@CENTREDAILY.COM

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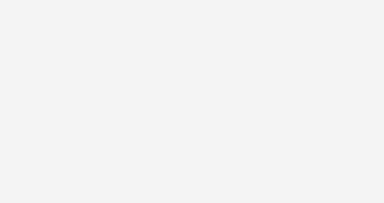
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