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**Summer on snow** By Ashley Matthews

CHARLOTTE -- It may be snowing outside, but at one Vermont business, December is time to break out the grill.

It's summer at Eating Well Magazine, where recipe developers are creating dishes for the magazine's June/July issue. Ripe peaches and strawberries may be a distant memory for chilly Vermonters, but they're among the seasonal ingredients used in the magazine's test kitchen this December, where summer meals are the focus of the magazine's creations. Jessie Price, Eating Well assistant food editor, is developing one of her own favorite summer fares as her next feature, "Steak Six Ways." That means hours and hours of testing -- and tasting -- at least six types of steak. For the article, the 32-year-old Charlotte resident hopes to develop six original steak recipes that meet the magazine's stringent nutritional guidelines, but still taste great.

Price will take vague ideas and refine them until the dishes garner praise from tasters. She will implement suggestions from fellow testers, editors and other magazine staffers. Finally, each recipe will be cross-tested at least once by a fellow tester to ensure it consistently works, even when cooked by someone else. On average, each Eating Well recipe is tested seven times. "I asked myself, 'How do I like to eat steak?'" Price said, describing how she developed the three steak recipes she tested Monday. "I asked, 'What are some of the memorable steaks I've eaten?'" Price didn't stop with those questions because memorable steak might not be healthy steak. She turned her ideas into healthy realities, pairing the steaks with vegetables and healthy herb sauces.

Each tester shops for her own food, visiting major grocery stores to ensure the ingredients are widely available for readers of the nationally distributed magazine. Price began her day at two large grocery chains, filling her cart primarily with unprocessed foods such as fresh vegetables, herbs and meat. When she reached the magazine's headquarters in Charlotte, Price brushed snow off the Eating Well grill and ventured to cook one of the steak recipes -- chimichurri and grilled ribeye with tomato salad. After the grill refused to light, Price retreated indoors and used the broiler to finish cooking the meat. She paused to taste a turkey sandwich with celery root, assembled by a nearby tester. Twenty minutes later, she stopped again to offer feedback on a fish chowder served by another colleague. The sandwich was, "just not exciting enough," said food editor Jim Romanoff, and consensus among the testers deemed the fish chowder badly needed salt. It wasn't even

noon, and testers had already tasted five dishes, including green beans, chicken with apples and grilled steak orzo. In all, they tried more than 13 recipes that day as five testers cooked energetically, some creating recipes for the magazine, others working on Eating Well's next cookbook, "Eating Well for Two," scheduled for release in August. The aromas changed rapidly, as did the flavors. As she cooked, Price carefully measured each ingredient, often weighing it to accurately document amounts. She noted any changes to the recipe, which she had tested a few times. She divided the tomato salad into parts so she could try it using two types of onion. When finished, Price arranged the food on the plate and snapped a photo with a digital camera. Then, she cut it into pieces and waited for the comments.

Price's steak garnered praise for its taste and appearance. Deeming the recipe a "success," she sat down to fill out a recipe test report, which must be completed every time a recipe is cooked. The page-long form requests specific information about the dish and how it was prepared, including yield, degree of difficulty, what type of oven or stove was used and any changes that should be made to the recipe. When finished, Price cleaned her work area and began again -- this time, on a grilled buffalo steak with grilled radicchio. It was a recipe Price said she'd tried before, but struggled to find the right flavor combinations. Monday, she revisited the recipe, adding a goat cheese dressing and beets, which helped balance radicchio's bitter flavor. "I've really liked the idea of this recipe, but it was just never right," Price said. "I put it away for awhile and have come up with a twist on it that I hope will improve it."

The intricate testing process at Eating Well is part of Romanoff's goal to produce practical recipes the magazine's thousands of readers can easily duplicate. Romanoff said the focus on practical recipes came with the magazine's relaunch in 2002. Since then, Eating Well has released three cookbooks, including the recent "Healthy in a Hurry," which features 150 recipes that can be made in 45 minutes or less. "Getting dinner on the table every night is a priority," Romanoff said. "We consider ourselves 'foodies,' but don't want to be intimidating or create recipes almost everyone couldn't create."

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