

What inspired you to apply for the show?

I started Holley in the Kitchen in January 2025, and in October 2025, a casting director reached out to me on Instagram about a new Food Network opportunity. At first, I honestly thought it was a scam! After talking with the casting team on the phone, I realized it was legitimate and decided to apply along with a casting video.

The show was specifically looking for home cooks - people without professional culinary training or experience as private chefs. Since I cook just like so many families do at home, I thought, "Why not represent home cooks across the country and give it a shot?"

After submitting my application, I received occasional updates but didn't hear much for several months. Then, on January 9, I got the phone call that changed everything...I had been cast on *100 Cooks*! Just a couple of weeks later, on January 22, I was on a plane to Los Angeles. I was told I could be gone anywhere from three days to two weeks, depending on how long I stayed in the competition. It was an exciting leap into the unknown!

What was the experience like from start to finish?

The entire experience was unlike anything I've ever done before. The show was filmed inside a former IKEA building in Los Angeles that had been completely transformed into the incredible set you saw on television.

When we first arrived, we toured the building and learned where we would spend our days as well as got a tour of the pantry. We also received our apron and what number we would be representing on the show. We were numbered 1 to 100 and I was designated as #95. I wore it proud!

We were only allowed on the kitchen set while cameras were rolling, so the rest of the time we stayed in a holding area where we got to know the other contestants. Even though we were competing against one another, we quickly became friends because we all shared the same passion for cooking. I still keep in touch with many of them today.

With 100 home cooks, there were a lot of personalities and cooking styles under one roof! Each morning we left the hotel around 7:00 a.m. and usually didn't return until 8:30 or 9:00 p.m. - sometimes even later.

Our days followed a pretty consistent routine: breakfast provided by production, a briefing about the day's challenge, time on set filming, and if you competed that day, additional interviews afterward where you talked through every decision you made while cooking. It was long days, but every minute was worth it.

As the competition went on and more cooks were eliminated, things became much quieter. We all became laser-focused on making it through the next round. One of the

most exciting parts of the competition was that we never knew what challenge was coming next or who would be selected to cook. Challenge balls were drawn before each round, and every time that machine started rolling, my heart raced. I sat on the edge of my seat wondering if my name was about to be called to head back into the kitchen.

One of the biggest highlights for me was having the honor of being the very first contestant to spin the Money Ball mixer. After winning the "One-of-a-Kind Burger" challenge with my [Smashburger Tacos](#), I earned the chance to spin for a \$10,000 Money Ball. But there was a catch...I had to decide whether to take the \$10,000 and leave the competition immediately or give the money back to add to the grand prize pot and continue competing.

It was a tempting decision, but for me, the experience was worth so much more than the money. Competing on the Food Network was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I knew I wasn't ready for it to end. Without hesitation, I gave the Money Ball back and kept cooking. Looking back, it was one of the easiest decisions I made because no amount of money could replace the memories, friendships, and opportunities that came from continuing the competition. Plus, I made it to the top 3 out of 100!

Any favorite memories or behind-the-scenes moments you'd be willing to share?

Without a doubt, my favorite part was the people. Instead of feeling like 99 competitors, we became a family. We celebrated each other's successes, encouraged one another, and created friendships that continue today.

One thing viewers didn't get to see was how genuine the judges and host were behind the scenes. Terry Crews is every bit as kind and humble as he seems on television. He laughed with us, encouraged us, and even shared emotional moments with us throughout the competition. Alex Guarnaschelli was not only incredibly knowledgeable, but also hilarious. She kept everyone smiling with her jokes and made the set feel relaxed and fun. Nick DiGiovanni brought a unique perspective because he had once been a competitor himself, and I always appreciated his thoughtful feedback.

Reaching the Top 3 out of 100 home cooks is a moment I'll never forget. I never imagined I'd be standing there on a Food Network set competing at that level. The tears I shed were tears of gratitude, pride, and disbelief. It reminded me that you never know where following your passion can take you. My biggest encouragement to others is to never stop chasing your dreams - you might surprise yourself with what's possible.

Thank you to everyone in the community who supported me through this journey! Hearing from each of you each week when you watched each episode and cheering me on truly meant the world. I am forever grateful!

Tell us about your visit to St. Luke's Summer Camp.

Cooking with the campers at St. Luke's Summer Camp was such a fun experience! I loved hearing about the foods they enjoy, what they've already learned to cook, and all of their creative ideas in the kitchen.

One of my favorite activities was showing them how simply changing the presentation of something as ordinary as five chicken nuggets could completely transform the meal. It taught them that food isn't just about taste - it's also about creativity, presentation, and making something feel special.

The best part of the day was hearing a few campers tell me afterward that they wanted to be a cook just like me. Moments like that remind me why I love sharing my passion for cooking with others. I also got to teach them one of my favorite cookie recipes so they could recreate it at home with their families.

You can follow along with my cooking adventures on Instagram @[holleyinthekitchen](#), on Facebook at [Holley in the Kitchen](#), and find recipes on my website at [holleyinthekitchen.com](#).