



Top Picks

Flavor: Ozarka students training for culinary glory

By Jeannie Stone

THREE RIVERS AREA — In one corner of the culinary classroom at Ozarka College in Melbourne, chef and culinary arts instructor Mimi Newsome assisted a first-year student in decorating a tiered cake. In another corner, instructor Eric Smith supervised students embellishing party trays, and off to the side, a student grilled steaks flavored with the special seasoning he created. For students enrolled in the culinary arts program, class work is a hands-on experience.

The energy level, palpable in the controlled, yet humming, environment, could overwhelm the timid visitor. The students were preparing for an upcoming catering event in Batesville and, less than a week away, the Arkansas Association of SkillsUSA Leadership and Skills Conference in Hot Springs where nine students registered to compete in the Culinary Food Preparation, Baking and Dining Room divisions.

"Today I'm measuring the ingredients I'll need for the competition," first-year student Tammy Ragle of Batesville said. She will be preparing an entire meal and has chosen to present sautéed Chicken Chasseur with Caesar salad and French Onion Soup as her entry. Ragle hopes to open her own restaurant in Montana upon graduating the two-year course.

"I love wide-open spaces and cooking, so why not combine the two?"

First-year student Bobby Switzer of Mountain View has dreams of opening his own Italian restaurant.

"I love this program," he said, "and I'm hoping I succeed in opening up a restaurant around here because the closest good one is in Batesville, and that's too far to drive."

Phil Casey, 46, agreed. He is the one grilling steaks and admits grilling is his favorite kind of cooking. He is hoping to open a steakhouse in the Melbourne area.

"I already have a name for it," he said. "I'm calling it Bull Pen Steakhouse, and it's going to have a bucking bull."

Having owned three businesses unrelated to food, Casey might be a little ahead of the other students.

"I knew my dream was worth pursuing, and my wonderful wife, Dean, supports me all the way. She's getting me through school and paying all the bills."

Discussing the various sides of a career in the food industry is important, explained Smith, who graduated from the program in 1994, purchased a restaurant and ran it for 10 years. Smith currently owns the Hawk's Nest restaurant on the local golf course.

"I've seen all sides of the business, and I make sure the students are well versed in purchasing knowledge. That includes tips on saving money when ordering inventory and equipment," he said. "We cover everything they need to know about running a commercial kitchen."

The program does a brisk business with a catering service.

"We cater weddings, lunches, and bake and decorate cakes for special orders," Smith said. "These students really get their hands dirty here."

Developing new skills is what second-year student Mario Romero, laid off from his former job, had in mind when he enrolled in the program.

"I like to eat, so why not cook?" the 37-year old asked.

Romero likes to cook Spanish and Mexican food. "Some of what I cook looks strange to some of the other students," he said and laughed. "To me, seafood is the bomb. I love muscles and squid." It's evident that the culinary arts program satisfies the different tastes of members of the eclectic student body. What they all share is a passion for food.

"I already have an investor with a restaurant background," Casey said. "I'm ready to go, and this school has given me the best training." For more information, call Ozarka College at (800) 821-4335 or log onto www.ozarka.edu.

[ozarka.edu](http://www.ozarka.edu).

Following are a few recipes the students prepare.

ROAST MEATLOAF Ingredients: 2 eggs 1 cup milk 3/4 cup raw quick-cooking oats 1 tablespoon salt (can reduce according to taste) 1/2 teaspoon dried savory leaves 1/4 teaspoon pepper 1 tablespoon chopped parsley 1 tablespoon butter 1/2 cup coarsely chopped onion 2 1/2 pounds ground chuck
Glaze Ingredients: 1/2 cup chili sauce 2 tablespoons brown sugar 1/4 teaspoon dry mustard 1/2 teaspoon liquid gravy seasoning
Directions: In a large bowl, beat eggs slightly with fork. Stir in milk, oats, salt, savory leaves, pepper and parsley; set aside.

Sauté onion and butter in hot skillet until onion is tender - about five minutes - and add to egg mixture, along with

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ground chuck. Mix until well combined, using hands if necessary. Line a 9-by-5-by-3-inch loaf pan with waxed paper. Turn meat mixture into pan, packing down well. Refrigerate, covered, at least two hours. Bake in preheated 350 degree oven for 30 minutes. Mix ingredients for glaze while meatloaf is in oven. Remove meatloaf and glaze before returning to oven for remaining 30 minutes.

Test for doneness. Bake additional 15 minutes if center is too pink.

SWEET AND SOUR PORK Ingredients: 1 (20-ounce) can pineapple chunks (juice-packed) 2 carrots, peeled, halved lengthwise and cut into 1-inch pieces Cooking oil, for frying 2 medium onions, chopped 1 green sweet pepper, cut into 1/2-inch squares (1 cup) 1 clove garlic, peeled and sliced 2/3 cucumber, unpeeled and cut into 1/2-inch pieces (2 cups) 6 dried Shiitake mushrooms, soaked and sliced (optional) 3 cups hot cooked white or brown rice Sauce: Ingredients: 1/4 cup sugar 2 1/2 tablespoons cornstarch 1/2 cup catsup 1/3 cup rice vinegar 1 tablespoon soy sauce 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour 1 tablespoon cornstarch 1/2 teaspoon salt 1/4 teaspoon pepper 1 egg 1 pound boneless pork, cut into 3/4-inch cubes Directions: Drain the pineapple, reserving 3/4 cup juice; set aside. In a saucepan, partially cook the carrots in boiling water to cover for five minutes; drain, reserving 3/4 cup cooking water (or add water, if necessary, to make 3/4 cup). Set aside.

To make the sauce: In a 3-quart saucepan, stir together sugar and 2 1/2 tablespoons cornstarch. Add the reserved water, reserved pineapple juice, catsup, rice vinegar and soy sauce. Cook and stir for one minute more and set aside.

In a small bowl, stir together flour, 1 tablespoon cornstarch, salt and pepper. Add egg, stirring until smooth.

Add pork cubes, stirring to coat.

To fry: In a heavy skillet or a 4-quart Dutch oven, pour cooking oil to measure 1/2-inch deep. When the oil is hot, add pork cubes, a few at a time. Cook about two minutes or until browned on all sides. Using a slotted spoon, remove pork from pan; drain on paper towels. Keep warm. Repeat until all the pork cubes are cooked. Carefully add onions, green sweet pepper and garlic to oil in skillet. Cook for two minutes.

Using a slotted spoon, remove the vegetables and drain on paper towels. Repeat with carrots, cucumber and mushrooms (if using). Stir the drained vegetables and pineapple into the sauce and heat throughout. Stir in pork and serve with rice.

Tip: Dried mushrooms should be soaked for 30 minutes in enough warm water to cover them. Rinse well and squeeze to drain thoroughly. Remove and discard the tough stems.

SHEPHERD'S PIE Ingredients: 2 tablespoons Irish butter* 1 medium onion, chopped 2 carrots, sliced 4 tablespoons flour 4 cups browning stock Chopped parsley and thyme 1 pound cooked minced beef 24 ounces mashed potatoes 2 cups cheddar cheese *Irish butter is higher in butterfat and is sold under the brand name Kerrygold. Traditional butter may be substituted.

Directions: Melt butter in saucepan and add chopped onion. Cover and sweat for a few minutes. Add carrots and stir in flour. Cook until slightly browned. Add stock and herbs. Bring to a boil and reduce by boiling for five minutes. Add the meat and bring back to boil. Place in a pie dish and cover with mashed potatoes. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. For extra taste, grate cheese on top and cook final 10 minutes.

PEANUT BUTTER PIE Ingredients: 1 pie crust 3/4 cup sugar 1/3 cup Clear Jel (cornstarch) 1/4 teaspoon salt 2 1/2 cups milk 2 tablespoons butter 1 teaspoon vanilla 4 eggs, separated (whites will be used for meringue) Crumb sprinkles: 1/2 cup creamy peanut butter 1/3 cup powdered sugar Meringue: 4 egg whites 1/2 cup sugar 1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar Directions:

Mix sugar, Clear Jel and salt;

add milk, yolks, vanilla and butter.

Cook until thick, about 12 minutes.

Meanwhile, distribute crumb sprinkles over bottom of pie crust (may reserve small amount to garnish top of pie) and prepare meringue by beating ingredients in a cold bowl at high until stiff peaks form. When filling is thickened, pour into pie crust and top with meringue. Bake at 350 degrees for 12 minutes.

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