

Lunch is served at Coventry High School

Students learn about restaurant management

KENDRA LEIGH MILLER
kmliller@ricentral.com

COVENTRY — Students in the culinary arts program at the Career and Vo-tech School at Coventry High School are learning steps A through Z in professional kitchen and restaurant management, not only through classes but also by working in the school's own restaurant, the Knotty Oak Room. There are about 70 students in the program and each has a role in the restaurant, whether it's serving guests, food preparation, cooking, or baking.

According to Director Tina Andrews, the culinary program is four years long and is first offered in freshman year for a semester so that if a student is unsure about getting into it, they can try it first.

"There are some who have been in it for all four years and we've become a family," Andrews said.

Along with the Knotty Oak Room, the program has a fully-equipped, state-of-the-art kitchen behind it, with stations for dessert-making, prepping, cooking and cleaning along with refrigerators and freez-

ers.

"The Rhode Island Department of Health comes in to check, just as they would a regular restaurant and the first thing we teach students is sanitation," she said.

The restaurant is open for lunch Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and twice a month on Wednesdays for dinner from 4 to 7 p.m.

The lunch menu has daily specials featuring salads, soups and sandwiches, while the dinner menu has three courses where guests can choose between one of three options from each course.

"By having the restaurant, it's a great way for the students to get out there and get used to dealing with the public, and we also make pies for Thanksgiving and put together Thanksgiving dinners for those at the Senior Center," Andrews added. "We'll make about 120 pies."

Andrews loves being part of the program because she can see students gain confidence and learn something they enjoy.

"It teaches life skills, even if they're not going to work in a restaurant," she said. "We have a good reputation in town and if people are interested in hiring, in many cases, they call us because they know we have a program."

Lauren Tanner is in her second year of the program and said she always knew she wanted to be involved in the culinary arts.

"This program gives us a lot of variety and you learn all aspects of how to operate a kitchen and restaurant," she said.

Emily Harrison, a junior, said she's learned everything from the ground up.

"My favorite side of it is baking," she said. "Last year, we made gingerbread houses."

Coventry School Superintendent Craig Lewis is a regular guest for lunch.

"The space can also be used for various functions because it can accommodate a number of people. There can be team meetings here and other things, they would just have to coordinate it with Tina," he said.

To make reservations for a Wednesday night dinner, call 822-9499, ext. 292.



Photos by Kendra Miller

Students in the culinary arts program at the Career and Vo-tech School at Coventry High School are learning steps A through Z in professional kitchen and restaurant management. Above: Emily Harrison re-wraps fruit.