



Culinary Arts teacher, Julius Rosato, demonstrates sauteeing techniques to junior Nyeem (left) and senior Devin.

What's on the Menu at McKean

BY DENÉE CRUMRINE

GIVE A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT a hospitality job, employ them for a moment. Teach them the hospitality industry, give them a life-long career path. The Thomas McKean High School (McKean) Highlander Café does just that – teaches students in the Culinary Arts pathway all facets of operation, from creating menus and taking orders, to preparing and serving food, to hosting banquets and catering events. Students graduate with not just the hard skills of the kitchen, but the soft skills of business entrepreneurship.

McKean's original culinary arts curriculum focused on the skills and science needed for food preparation. Students learned kitchen and cooking skills, and were able to practice through creation. The school learned that, according to Careers through Culinary Arts Program (C-CAP), a national culinary arts-based nonprofit, "The restaurant and hospitality industry continues to surge with a forecast of 1.7 million new restaurant position by 2025; there is tremendous demand for trained, hardworking, and dedicated staff." Taking this to heart, and recognizing the impact a more robust

program could have, not just for the students, but for the community, the vision for Highlander Café took root.

In 2013, the café opened as place where students could not just read a recipe, but cook a meal; not just read about how to treat guests in a restaurant, but actually deliver customer service to real patrons; and not only learn to prepare food, but to operate a business in the food industry. The skills developed within Highlander Café give students real-world marketable experience in a competitive field. Its unique learning environment fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and high-level achievement. The newly refreshed program also proposed that by actively engaging students in the operations of the restaurant, they would be more vested in the learning process and its outcomes.

The plan delivered. In four years, the program grew by 50 students, requiring the hiring of a second instructor. Highlander Café started with 18 events the first year open, netting just over \$1,300, and grew to 87 events with a profit of over \$11,000, only two years later. Numbers aside,

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more students are participating in more complex roles – creating their own unique recipes, attending client meetings and planning menus. The program expanded even more with a partnership between the Café and the Business & Marketing classes. McKean business students worked on advertising and other front of house duties, such as taking orders and processing payments, helping the business to grow.

“An important daily lesson for the young chefs at the Highlander Café is that their individual actions will impact the success of the entire venture. Additionally, humans learn best by doing and when they feel that their work is valuable and meaningful. The Highlander Café students are serious about their work and carry themselves with pride in their high school and community because they are contributing to the success of their business,” says assistant principal Jennifer Vosburgh, M.Ed.

McKean had to accommodate areas of growth, which included a special lunch menu for faculty, offsite catering jobs and community service events, to name a few. Scheduling had to be strategically reconfigured to ensure that the proper students and staff were available when needed, and transportation and parent communications had to be planned for getting students to events. For example, students are able to work the concession stands at Frawley Stadium through a partnership with the Blue Rocks, and Red Clay Presbyterian Church partners with McKean to provide Saturday morning breakfast for the homeless in their area.

Looking ahead, the Café has plans for a food truck, once a suitable vehicle is found, giving students an even greater grasp on the hospitality industry and entrepreneurship; and this fall, they will open their ‘Snack Shack’, where faculty members can pre-order items, in effort to develop research and development, customer service and money management skills among second-year students, and basic prep work and cooking skills among first-year students. For vision, execution and success, Highlander Café most certainly earned its Superstar status. ■