

A Recipe for Success

Katy Students Learn Culinary Basics at Old Town Bistro

Written by Shetye Cypher and Photography by Marisa Hugonnett

During breakfast and lunch, Katy ISD's Old Town Bistro bustles with culinary arts students serving delicious dishes they are learning to make and running the restaurant behind the scenes. Tucked in the end of the Miller Career and Technology Center, the student-run, teacher-led bistro provides students the opportunity to showcase all that they've learned about the restaurant business. For senior Cooper Gray, 18, it is an amazing experience. "I have learned how to cook food, how a restaurant works in and out, and how waiting tables isn't really so bad," he says. "I've learned that cooking is really fun and the program is definitely worth the two years."

Dishing Out Experience

The Bistro is set up where students operate the front and the back of the house. Every two weeks, the students rotate through stations like hot foods and desserts and roles like server, manager, and dishwasher. Learning the different skills associated with each role proved challenging for Gray.

"Working the front of the house was a challenge for me. I had avoided it. This year, the teacher made me work there," he says. "I'm glad I was forced to do it, because I realized it wasn't that bad and I kind of liked it, not to mention I was the best server we had while I was on rotation."

To offer students the most real life experience, the Bistro works similarly to an actual restaurant. Jessaca Fowler, a senior culinary student, says everyone understands they are running a real business. "On a busy day in the Bistro, everything can be a challenge," she says. "One time in particular, I got 12 orders of my chef's special at once. Being the only one in charge of preparing that dish was challenging. But as tough as it may sound, that's how it works in a real restaurant, which is what makes the Bistro so authentic."

A Side of Creativity

With dishes that range from pecan-crust chicken tenders to flat bread margherita

pizzas, students learn the art of preparing enticing meals. "Our instructors give us various recipes and we follow them, occasionally asking for help," says Fowler. "They give us suggestions on what foods go well together and allow our creativity to take flight. Cooking is all about knowing what you want and just having fun and being creative with it."

Joining the Bistro Team

To work at the Old Town Bistro, students must complete an application for the two-year culinary arts program through their home school during either their sophomore or junior year. Students have the chance to preview the program every year during their high school's field trip to the Miller Center.

According to instructor Patricia Kenjura, Culinary Arts I is an introductory course for students to gain experience working in a commercial professional kitchen environment while learning the principles of food production. Emphasis is placed on the

techniques and technology used in the foodservice industry. Upon successful completion of the ServSafe exam, students receive ServSafe certification, a national industry qualification.

Culinary Arts II is the second half of the program and is designed to teach food preparation skills for those interested in employment in the restaurant industry or post-secondary culinary arts education. The class builds upon skills students learn in Culinary Arts I and provides them with occupationally specific instruction. Student chefs have the chance to run Old Town Bistro. When they complete the 10-hour CareerSafe training, students receive an OSHA workplace safety certification.

Food for Thought

For Fowler, the experience at Old Town Bistro has taught her valuable lessons. "I have definitely learned many cooking skills that are vital to making a good meal, and I feel confident that I will be able to be a good host to others," she says. "Cooking gives me a chance to express myself in means of food. When I create a final product that is delicious and looks good, I feel very proud and accomplished."

The Old Town Bistro is open on Wednesdays and Thursdays for breakfast from 7:30-8:30 a.m. and lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Call 281-237-7580 or visit katyisd.org. KM

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Andrew Kicey and Jalyssa Strickland prepare for the lunch crowd at Old Town Bistro



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