



Taravella ProStart students in the school's kitchen

What's cooking in school? Cooking!

Culinary programs serving up the first course for careers in the food industry

By Greg Carannante

There's been a lot cooking in high schools since the days when boys took shop and girls took home ec.

"When my mom took her home economics courses in the 1950s, they learned every egg preparation there was," says Susan Turgeson, president of the Association of Teacher Educators for family and consumer sciences. "The reason for that was, they didn't know what kind of eggs their husband might want." In today's world, she adds, husbands are expected to make their own eggs.

Also in today's world, there may be as many boys as girls taking culinary classes in high school.

"I think it's almost a 50-50 split," says Scott Goodman, culinary and hospitality instructor at J.P. Taravella in Coral Springs. "I think it's a little bit higher on the male side, because they're all watching

the Food Network and they're seeing all these guys do this stuff. But the girls can hold their own with the boys any day."

Those old home economics classes — now called family and consumer sciences classes — may be dwindling, but career-focused culinary programs have stepped it up. In Broward County, for example, there are 24 high schools and technical schools that offer culinary programs.

Depending on their focus, they generally include cooking as part of the classwork, covering such topics as safety, prepping and temperatures, says Christie Cerbone, curriculum supervisor for Career, Technical, Adult and Community Education for Broward Schools. Each class can average around 30 students. This year, there are 5,157 enrolled in culinary classes, and almost as many boys as



girls — 2,341 to 2,816. If they follow through with a culinary career, those students may find they are in demand. The restaurant industry is experiencing an unprecedented shortage of people entering the field, according to a story in *Mother Jones* magazine, and the Bureau of Labor projects the need for cooks will grow astronomically by 2024.

Helping to meet the demand are career-oriented programs offered not only at technical high schools like Atlantic, McFatter and Sheridan, but also as electives at traditional high schools like Taravella. There, the award-winning program just kicked off the school year with an extensive, new kitchen renovation, including gas-powered stoves, double stack and baking ovens, an overhead broiler and other state-of-the-art features. Funds for the renovation came from a \$50,000 grant from the Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association Educational Foundation. Taravella's student chefs beat out 240 other state schools for the award money last year.

"The kitchen renovation looks amazing," says Goodman, who's starting his 16th year at the school. "Winning that grant was a huge thing for us because I had been trying to 'piece' the same kitchen here and there over the 15 years. And now we finally have a full, brand-new line that gives these kids a real-world experience. They could walk out of the school and walk into a restaurant, and basically know everything that's in there."

And many of them can walk into a restaurant with the experience of having already operated one — Goodman's advanced classes run and staff a restaurant every day that serves breakfast and lunch to

Taravella faculty and staff. Thanks to Goodman's career-focused approach, his students have gone on to cook for the Ritz-Carlton and Miami chef Michelle Bernstein and attend prestigious culinary schools like Johnson and Wales University in Miami and the Culinary Institute of America.

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"I say to them: I'm not teaching you just to cook for the rest of your life. I'm trying to see if this type of industry is what you might be interested in," he says. "So they get high-volume cooking, from a diner-style all the way up to fine dining. Even the fast-food part as well, just so they have an idea of what's out there."

The Taravella restaurant has about 35 menu items. "We also put specials on there when kids want to learn how to do certain techniques," Goodman says. "We'll create a special so they can learn how to do that."

"The staff loves it because they know that we're always there for them, because we have all types of menu items — healthy, down-home comfort stuff, higher-end stuff. And we offer delivery service to them as well. So it's a full-day operation for the kids."

"The kids do run the whole operation, everything from the ordering to dealing with the customers for catering at other schools' events. The kids are doing all of the cooking, and if I have to actually get on the line and do something, I have my beard nets," he says, referencing a prodigious beard that's become quite legendary with his students. "But really, I'm just making sure that everything's getting done on time."

Goodman's 25 years in the food-service industry began when he started working in his dad's restaurant at age 14 — but genetically,

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perhaps, it started much earlier. “Both my grandparents had restaurants,” he says. “So I came from the industry. It’s a fast-paced type of environment, which I really like.”

As a National Restaurant Association Florida ProStart program, Taravella offers six first year classes and two advanced classes, all taught by Goodman. But it’s not just the advanced classes that get the practical, hands-on kitchen experience.

“Cooking is the way to go these days,” Goodman says. “The ‘level ones’ do the bookwork part; they learn the terminology and then they’re in the kitchen. And then, if this is something they’re really interested in, they apply to go to the advanced class.”

Last year’s award was not the first for Taravella’s program, which has won several competitions and even was selected to send students for a week at the Georges-Frêche School of Hotel Management in France a few years ago.

“We almost break even,” Goodman says. “We make enough for the kids to go to state competitions and not have to worry about paying for certain things. It all goes back into the program and these kids benefit 100 percent from all the things they do when we run a restaurant.”

“We try to stay as self-sufficient as possible. We want to be our own little entity where we can do what we need to do and give the customers really good food.” ●



New Taravella kitchen



COURTESY OF SCOTT GOODMAN AND HEALTHY HERITAGE

Culinary a la extracurricular

Not all food-related studies come from culinary programs, which are not offered at many public and private high schools. That’s where extracurricular clubs like Healthy Heritage come in.

About 20 upperclassmen at American Heritage School meet weekly after school at the environmentally oriented Healthy Heritage club to bite into such topics as moving from current food options to healthier foods, understanding where food comes from and reducing food waste and consumption overall.

“We have had parents or community members come in to either make recipes or talk about their approach to eating, like plant-based, raw vegan, etc.,” says faculty sponsor Julia Couper, a chemistry teacher at the Plantation campus. “We did also work on a garden at a senior center last year, with the goal of growing herbs that could be used in cooking. We completely overhauled their garden, but our visits very quickly turned into our members tending the garden and the seniors sitting inside watching TV.”

“As we operate an on-campus organic garden, I have learned more about how food ends up on our tables,” says club president Daniel Block, a 17-year-old senior from Golden Beach. “Seeing the full growing process gives you a wider perspective on the agricultural labor required to produce many foods we normally take for granted.”

“At Healthy Heritage, we encourage a plant-focused diet, as meat and dairy put a far larger strain on environmental resources. By growing the plants ourselves, we take a step further to responsibly source where our food comes from.”

— Greg Carannante