

IRSC Culinary Program Creates Recipe for Success

Staff, students, and study represent key ingredients of program's menu.

by Brenda Silva | Photos Courtesy The Culinary Institute at Indian River State College

On any day at The Culinary Institute at Indian River State College (IRSC), there are never "too many cooks in the kitchen," with interest and enrollment expanding like a well-made soufflé. And much like the classic dish, career opportunities for graduates can be just as sweet and satisfying.

Diversity of Program Provides Academic Appeal

Any culinary program worth its salt offers the basics of cooking; however, well-seasoned programs pepper in diversity as a kitchen staple. This is evident at IRSC, where there are approximately 75 students in the program, with ages ranging from high school teens to those in their mid-fifties. The students include people beginning first and second ca-



L: Chef Joe Faria, Quail Valley Golf and River Clubs, Vero Beach, IRSC Adjunct and Olympic Team Coach. R: IRSC Culinary Team members in Germany

reers, as well as veterans with an interest or experience in the industry.

Lisa Lamarre, Academic Coordinator, points out that while every student may have the same interests, not every student has the same career goals in mind.

"At IRSC, we offer students a culinary apprenticeship program or a degree program, with both taking about two years to complete. The apprenticeship offers a certificate for students already working in the industry who are looking for skills that can lead to promotions. The degree program is designed for students looking for a more extensive course of study."

Chef William Solomon, Department Chair and Associate Professor, added, "We see a lot of students right out of high school, and our program offers them exposure to the industry and the skills it requires. Also, our veterans bring real-world experience to the classroom, making it a unique place to learn for everyone."

Employment Opportunities Enhance Student Palates

When considering employment opportunities for students in either program, Chef Solomon is quick to point out the role students must play in their own success.

"Our programs give students the skills they need, but when it comes to employment, 100% of students that want to be employed are employed, before and after they graduate. Many of our students already have jobs or professional ties in the industry, and if they don't, we have various job postings that can help them make the connections they need."

Along with traditional transcripts, students in the IRSC culinary programs receive co-curriculum transcripts that detail community service, volunteering, and participation in events that offer hands-on practice with skills learned in class.

Director/Instructor Chef Debbie Midkiff added, "Because our students come from diverse economic backgrounds, we try to help students accommodate costs through a combination of available grants, loans, and scholarships."

Former Students Savor Advanced Opportunities

Culinary education can extend far beyond the kitchen classroom – all the way to another country. In October, three former IRSC students competed at the 2016 IKA Culinary Olympics held in Erfurt, Germany. Prior to the five-day event, the competitors spent many hours practicing their entries in an attempt to create the perfect plate for presentation. The judges

were impressed and awarded medals to all three students – two bronzes and one silver.

Graduate Austin Miller received a bronze medal (along with fellow graduate Jacob Geib), and plans to continue his education, hopeful about returning to IRSC in a teaching capacity.

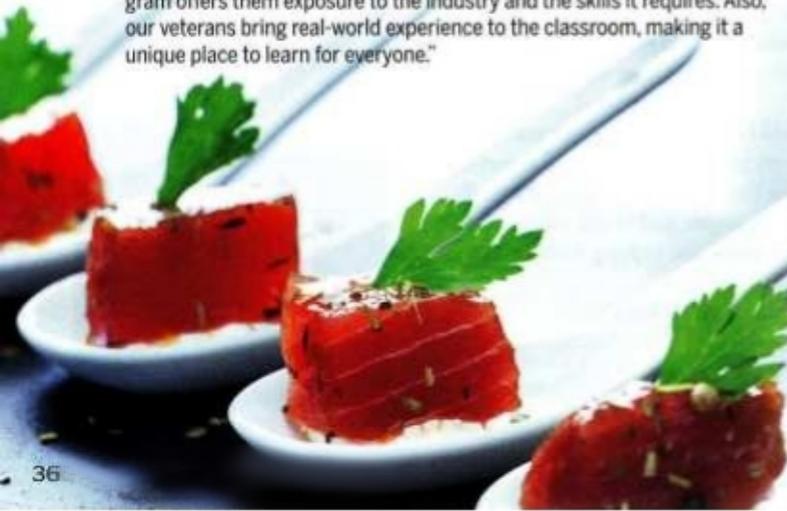
"The IRSC program gives students a great structure and teaches more than just basics. That's why I want to teach there, as a way to give back to the college and the community. One great aspect of the program and the Olympics was being part of a team, both in class and working beside other teams in Germany."

Along with their chefs from IRSC, students were also accompanied by Chef Joe Faria, Executive Chef/Food & Beverage Director at the Quail Valley Golf Club. Chef Faria is a member of the IRSC advisory board, and mentored the students as they prepared for the competition – himself a competitor at the same competition in 1988.

He summarized, "The competition was amazing. The kinds of things they were doing would have seemed impossible when I competed, and now, the irony is that so much of it will soon be surpassed by even better talent."

Recent graduate Kaitlyn Sullivan, who earned a silver medal in Germany, detailed her experience and offered advice for anyone interested in a similar career path.

"It was overwhelming competing against teams from around the world, but I wouldn't trade the experience for anything. To anyone interested in working in the culinary industry, I say take advantage of any opportunity that comes along – in the classroom or in the field – because no matter how scary it may seem at the time, it will all be worth it in the end."





L: Collage of Kaitlyn Sullivan college practice entries.
R: Kaitlyn prepares her IKA Culinary Olympics entries. She won a silver medal.



L: Jacob Geib with his display at the IKA Culinary Olympics
R: Collage of Jacob's college practice entries.



L: Collage of Austin Miller's college practice entries.
R: Austin with his display at the IKA Culinary Olympics