

THE MAIN

LEARNING HEATS UP WHEN HOTEL AND RESTAURANT MANAGEMENT STUDENTS TAKE THE CLASSROOM INTO THE KITCHEN

THE A LA CARTE LINE IS LIKE A MOSH PIT. BODIES WHIZ AROUND A cramped, hot space. Pots and pans clang like cymbals. Knives cleave carrots, potatoes and tear-jerking onions with rapid-fire rat-a-tat-tats. Mixers whirl, steamers hiss, grease sizzles. Somehow, Michael Keene, BS Ag '74, MS '94, a hotel and restaurant management instructor, will lead 25 students in transforming this cacophony into a symphonious meal for 125 University Club customers.

Tonight's meal is part of the toilsome "dinner series"—a sequence of 10 weekly meals planned, prepared and served by students in the program's Commercial Food Production Management class. The series culminates the five-credit-hour course, which Jim Caruso calls "the big class of our major." Students compare it to a journalism major's term-long boot camp at the *Columbia Missourian*. They spend at least 20 hours planning each four-course spread. "It keeps you busy all semester," Caruso says.

The class bones up on everything from basic sanitizing and bulk-food purchasing to pairing foods and wines. The course objective, Keene says, isn't to season chefs; it's to prepare students for management positions in the fast-growing food-service and hospitality industries. According to the Culinary Institute of America, those fields will see a 42 percent employment increase by 2005. The class is mandatory for hotel and

restaurant management majors.

THE CULINARY CLASS HOSTS ITS DINNER SERIES IN THE UNIVERSITY CLUB'S PRIVATE DINING ROOM IN THE DONALD W. REYNOLDS ALUMNI AND VISITOR CENTER.



COURSE

STORY BY DAWN

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The dinner series gobbles up most of its students' time. Rotating management teams orchestrate each meal. Each is planned around a theme—tonight's Pacific Northwest, for example, or a tour of Europe, taste of the Orient, or feast of the little dragons. Weeks in

advance, the team chooses its theme; conducts tests in a kitchen laboratory; converts recipes to match the number of diners; selects, prices and orders menu items; and develops production schedules designating who will do what in the kitchen and dining room. The team chooses the china, glassware, linens and garnishes; plans the table setting; writes the menu-item descriptions; designs the menu; determines the servers' dress code; secures theme-related props; and chooses background music.

"It's like starting a restaurant from scratch, week after week," says Dana Bell. The team even dictates how to fold the napkins.

Each meal's preparations begin at about 2 p.m., and no one leaves until every last crumb is cleaned up, usually around 11 p.m. The countdown to 5:30—when the soup's on—brings the crew to a rapid boil. "There will be moments when the management team is freaking out," says student Julie Thompson.

The "freak-out" extends to the smallest details. Tonight, those assigned to the "front of house," or dining room, fret about candles, which stick out three inches above their hurricane shades. "Just hack the bottoms off," Caruso says. But that's already been considered. "They won't fit into the holders," comes the reply. "Well, hack off the tops, then."

Keene's solution comes as if on a silver platter: Light 'em and leave 'em. "It's two hours 'til we serve," he says.

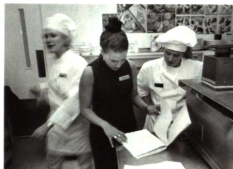
Behind the swinging kitchen door, nerves are getting scorched. Students shouldering trays of food dart among the full-time University Club caterers. Others chop veggies so quickly it sounds like teeth chattering. Skin sears, plates shatter. Around here,

Roasted rack of lamb with Dijon crust, glazed carrots, grilled jalapeño polenta



THE KITCHEN IS ONE GIANT PRESSURE COOKER AS MIKE SEIBERT HOISTS A BRAISING PAN OFF THE STOVE.





FROM LEFT, JOHNNA FERGUSON, ANGELA BADOLATO AND LEANNE WALLIS REVIEW THE EVENING'S PRODUCTION SCHEDULE. THE SCHEDULE IS PART OF A 30-PAGE INFORMATION PACKET PREPARED BY THE MANAGEMENT TEAM.



FROM LEFT, INSTRUCTOR MICHAEL KEENE AND STUDENTS MILJAN KAMARUDDIN, SHAWN EBERT AND ANDY BERMAN TEST RECIPES IN THE ECKLES HALL LABORATORY KITCHEN THE WEEK BEFORE THEY PREPARE THE REAL MEAL.



FROM LEFT, KEENE AND SEIBERT CHECK THE TEMPERATURE OF THE MEAT IN A ROLLING FOOD BAK. CUSTOMERS HAD THEIR CHOICE OF PORK TENDERLOIN MEDALLIONS, PEPPERED CHUTNEY TENDERLOIN OR GRILLED CHICKEN THUNDER FOR THE TOUR OF EUROPE THEME DINNER.

people show off their burns like warriors do battle scars. Are there too many cooks in the kitchen?

Sometimes, it seems, the class could use even more pairs of hands to scrub, peel, slice and season—or to help stir up solutions

when certain foods flop.

Take the potato people. Their mission? To perfect a Dutch-and-sweet-potato purée, piped out of a pastry bag into peaked puffs. The spud specialists, in oversized chef's coats and jaunty toques, look like lab researchers around a fascinating specimen. "We're all about science," says Matt Thompson, Julie's twin.

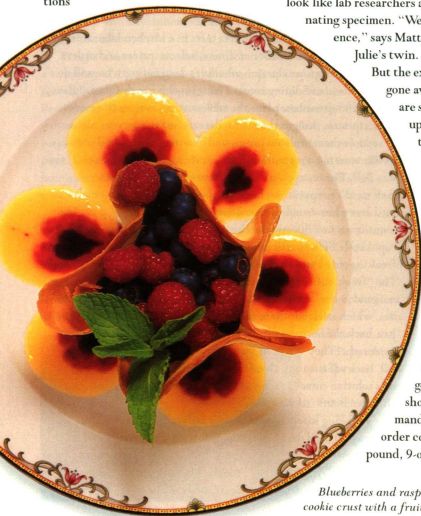
But the experiment has gone awry. The spuds are supposed to set up a bit, but they've gone soupy. Julie prods them with a spoon. "What would you say to adding a No. 10 from the lab?" Matt asks Keene, who is bustling around the congested kitchen, shouting commands like a short-order cook. The 6-pound, 9-ounce can of

yams, plus a generous portion of "potato pearls"—dehydrated tubers—add up to a clumpy concoction jiggling between solid and liquid states. Julie cranks the mixer up to a Harley-Davidson roar, and after some more improvisations—the recipe, like an ill-conceived hypothesis, is long since left behind—the purée is fit for a prince. "We created well," Julie concludes.

Achieving royal results is no small potatoes for the student restaurateurs. They want a straight-A dinner series so that customers—mostly alumni, retired faculty and students' families and friends—keep coming back.

Cooking, in a nutshell, is simply "applying heat to food," says Rick Lampe, the University Club's executive chef. But the heat's really on the students, who'll tell you there's more than one way to warm vittles. Keene makes the students experiment with varied cooking methods, "even if you've never turned on a microwave," says Julie Thompson.

At least three cooking methods must be used for each meal. For tonight's Pacific Northwest expedition, students baked, broiled and sautéed such dishes as Pacific Pleasure (salmon in Gorgonzola cheese). The Northwest Passage (sirloin steak on an archipelago of mushrooms) and Portland's Best (walnut-coated chicken breast). And the preparations can't be half-baked. Students follow a strict budget; less than a third—roughly 31 per-



Blueberries and raspberries in a cookie crust with a fruit coulis



PESTO AND ASIAGO CHEESE ADD ZIP TO SHRIMP PIZZAS SERVED AS APPETIZERS FOR THE TOUR OF EUROPE THEME DINNER. EACH DINNER-SERIES MEAL MUST OFFER AN ARRAY OF APPETIZERS, THREE ENTREES, TWO "STARCHES," TWO VEGETABLES AND TWO DESSERTS.



CHEFS MEET SERVERS AT THE SERVING LINE IN THE CLUB KITCHEN. THE CHEFS MUST BE IN SYNCH WITH THE WAIT STAFF SO THAT FOOD GOES OUT AT THE RIGHT TIME AND TEMPERATURE TO EACH DINER.



DAWN FREITAG PUTS THE FINISHING TOUCHES ON A TABLE FOR TWO. FROM THE SECOND STORY OF THE REYNOLDS ALUMNI CENTER, THE UNIVERSITY CLUB DINING ROOM OVERLOOKS TOWNSEND AND JESSE HALLS ON CONLEY AVENUE.

cent—covers food costs. The rest goes to decorations, linens, menu paper and printing costs, bartenders' wages and the University Club's facility-use fee. The customer's cost for every four-course meal must fall between \$12 and \$17.50, allowing for a small profit to cover teaching assistants' salaries, food-lab costs and the like. "You have to cost out each ingredient of each recipe, so if you've got, say, two ounces of salt in a side dish, you've got to add that into the per-plate cost," says Scott Godke.

Despite the hard work, more and more students flock to MU's hotel and restaurant management program for bachelor of science degrees from the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources. Started in 1969, the program has since grown rapidly, and its 300 students have outgrown their facilities in Eckles Hall. A new addition, funded by federal, state and private sources, will include a food lab, a commercial kitchen, a fine-dining facility, a classroom and a conference room. Fall 1999 is the scheduled completion date. The improvements are expected to draw even more students to the program. "We're hoping for an increase of 25 percent," Keene says.

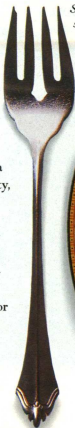
There should be no shortage of jobs for those students after graduation. In the Commercial Food Production Management course, they get a taste of everything from hosting and serving to

cooking and keeping the books. They even dabble in interior design.

Not long before the diners are due to arrive, student Dana Bell arranges pine needles, rocks, driftwood and silk flowers on the credenza. Local florists often donate decorations; other times, students use their own contacts—like the cousin who lent her collection of 50 nutcrackers for the European tour—to set the scene. Keene sends a box of soppy pinecones to the back. "They get wet and close up," he says, "so we'll pop 'em in the oven

and they'll open up like pinecones should."

In 30 minutes—and counting—the first customers will trickle into this elegant version of the Pacific Northwest. The candles will be melted down, the pinecones wide open and the sumptuous four-course spread worthy of a standing ovation. "It's a total state of panic week after week, and we end up improvising," says Julie Thompson. "But in the end, somehow, it always works out."



Salad with orange segments and almonds

