

Culinary arts training offered by AVC

Program will span four semesters for juniors and seniors at area schools

BY JASON SILVEY
SENTINEL NEWS STAFF

MT. VERNON — Students who think they might have a flair for cooking will have the opportunity to try the new culinary arts program at the Mt. Vernon Area Vocational Center.

The AVC is a cooperative entity between Mt. Vernon, Waltonville, Wayne City, Webber and Woodlawn high schools and located at Mt. Vernon Township High School that offers career and technical education programs affordably for the school districts. The AVC's newest field of study is in the skills of the professional food service industry.



Rob Knutson
Area Vocational Center director

"It's new this year. We're looking to register students now. I have the classes approved. I have the instructor approved. It's a big accomplishment," AVC Director Rob Knutson said. "It's a program that none of the schools can offer by themselves, but collectively they can."

Knutson said while the AVC has

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"always had a strong foods program" that emphasizes "the nutritional aspects of food and the staples of cooking," he believes that the culinary arts program will give students the opportunity "to move to the next level."

One of the hurdles in the past was that the food program courses were limited to standard 50-minute blocks of time, which is insufficient to cook and develop more elaborate dishes, Knutson said. As a full AVC career path, students will get two-hour classes in the culinary arts.

The program will span a total of four semesters for juniors and seniors with the Food and Nutrition I class as a prerequisite for enrollment and promises to cover much more ground than just how to cook a meal.

The course description for Culinary Arts I states, "Stu-

dents will receive instruction through classroom and laboratory experiences by using commercial equipment for preparing food in small and large quantities." The curriculum will include "orientation to all aspects of the food industry, food preparation, quantity production, quality control of food preparation, safety and sanitation and planning and budgeting," according to the AVC information.

Culinary Arts II is the next class following Food Service Occupations I and will further develop those skills and theories with additional information management and catering. Both courses will also encourage students to join Family, Career and Community Leaders of America activities.

"There's a very significant demand for workers in the culinary arts," Knutson said, pointing out the many restau-

rants, hotels, and catering services who will continue to need skilled employees. He hopes that student interest will respond in kind to meet that demand. "We'll know within two to three weeks what the [enrollment] numbers are," he said in mid-February. "I hope the numbers are there."

Instructor Julie Holmes said, "I'm excited to see what we can do with two hours." She added that the new program will also give students "the opportunity to learn about the culinary arts program at Rend Lake College."

In early April, Knutson reported "the class is a go" to begin this fall. "The registration came through," he said, with 20 to 25 interested students filling each class in the new program set to begin in the fall.

Clarke Griffin, Associate

Professor of Culinary Arts and Coordinator of Campus Food Services at Kaskaskia College, said he has seen an increase in enrollment since the program began five years ago as well as increased demand for skilled food preparers in the area.

"It's been growing," he said. "It's a passion-driven profession. You have to have a love for food and for serving people. It can be a mental and physical drain, but if you love it, it's very rewarding."

Both Kaskaskia College and Rend Lake College offer two-year Associate in Applied Science degree programs in culinary arts with classes ranging from food preparation, nutrition, and baking to dining room and banquet management, restaurant operations, cost control and culinary math.

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