

## They learn to cook, we get to eat

Local schools open culinary programs where students can learn, public can dine

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The next Wolfgang Puck, Bobby Flay or Rachael Ray could already be cooking up a storm in New Hampshire at one of the culinary programs being run at high schools across the state. Whether the program has existed for more than a decade or less than a year, the next generation of great cooks is being exposed to all roles in the kitchen and dining room to cultivate their passion and give them the experience they need to find sweet or savory success in the culinary field.

### Windows on West Street is open

100+ students cook at Milford High School

Having grown up helping in the kitchen, Jessica Dean entered high school with a passion for cooking.

"I love being in the kitchen, all the smells ... I love to be creative with my cooking — you don't need a recipe," said the aspiring chef.

Dean, 17, is a senior at Souhegan High School but has been bused to Milford High School daily for the last year and a half to take part in the school's culinary program. She is one of nearly 10 out-of-district students working in the kitchen and on the floor of Windows on West Street, the restaurant at MHS. Dean is earning college credit from Lakes Region Community College through her enrollment in the program.

"I just love being here," Dean said. "I've made so many friends in the last two years and have learned so many new recipes in a new learning environment."

The culinary program and Windows on West Street have been part of the MHS community for 13 years. This year an estimated 130 students are enrolled in three blocks of 90-minute culinary classes.

In the 2,500-square-foot kitchen designated for the program, the first class starts preparing soups, vegetables, breads and pastries for the day at 7:30 a.m.; the second block also makes breads and pastries and preps the ingredients needed for the dishes that will be offered that day. Salad dressings are also made from scratch during the first two sections of the class (soy vinaigrette is the restaurant's house dressing). The third class takes the reins at 10:45 a.m., manning the stove, oven, dishwasher and all other back-of-the-house aspects of the restaurant.

In the dining room the A block counts the money earned the day before and makes a deposit; the students also stock the pastries and vacuum the restaurant's rug. The next block sets up the dining room, fills the garnish station, slices the bread and readies the butters, creams and ketchup. The C block students serve as the waitstaff and don collared shirts and neckties.



Photo 1 of 3

### Windows on West Street at Milford High School

Hours: Wednesday through Friday, 11:15 a.m.-12:15 p.m. Tuesdays are added on to the schedule at the end of January.

Each student spends time on different roles around the restaurant, on a rotating schedule.

"We expose the students to all different areas because it gives them a set of skills they can use to apply for jobs with," said Paul Joyce, Windows on West Street dining room manager. "They will have experience and know where they feel comfortable at a restaurant."

The restaurant is open to the public and sees many elderly diners, which Joyce said does two things: it lets students develop a comfort level and even friendships with older people, and it allows the elderly to see youngsters in a positive light.

"We have two diverse groups interacting with each other," Joyce said. "It's great to watch as the year goes on."

"Please could you seat her?" he asked a student standing at the restaurant's host station as a female staffer entered the dining room.

The 60-seat dining room has its own entrance (diners may park in the visitor lot at the school) and waiting area. Strands of glowing white rope lights are strung across the ceiling and antique kitchen ware is displayed in shadow boxes on the walls alongside student artwork. A server station tucked in the corner of the restaurant holds pitchers full of water, a tall wooden pepper grinder, extra utensils and two point-of-sale systems.

Pastries are kept in a glass bakery case manned by students. The bakery shop station also has a window inside the school's dining room at which select students are allowed to make purchases during their lunch period. Recently, the shelves at the shop were filled with macaroons, fruit tarts, pumpkin pie bars and whoopie pies. Bread and rolls, too, are sold as to-go items.

The dining room menu, Joyce said, is more functional than seasonal.

"Minestrone soup comes around a lot because it allows us to teach students to cut vegetables," he said. Meat, chicken and seafood are always among the daily offerings at the restaurant. One recent Friday, London Broil, Seafood Casserole (made with sea scallops, haddock, shrimp and crab meat) and Chicken Saute (with tomatoes, shallots, garlic and oregano) were offered, with prices ranging from \$6.50 to \$7.75. All meals are served with salad, a starch, vegetables and rolls. The starch, quiche, vegetable, soup and sandwich of the day are listed on the specials board in the kitchen, leaving it up to the students to share that information with their customers.

The culinary students take a field trip to a local restaurant every year, with the tips earned at Windows on West Street during the year used to offset the cost of transportation (all money earned at the restaurant goes back into the program). Last year, students visited The Barn restaurant in Grafton, Mass., and spoke with the chef, the owner and the farmers who supply organic food to the eatery.

"[The field trips] are an opportunity for students to see what they are learning here done in the industry," Joyce said.

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