

IN THE NEWS

Young chefs learn way around kitchen

BY AL CARSON, The Herald-Sun
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DURHAM -- I spent a day with some budding chefs of the Triangle recently and it did my heart good.

It seems teens are the main reason McDonald's has sold billions and billions of burgers and the standard fare for school lunches is too often french fries and pizza. For that reason, I was amazed when some local youngsters spent a week at a culinary camp, learning the basics of cooking.

Joel Goldfarb, owner and chef at Chez Bay Gourmet Cooking School, whose motto is "Teaching the Triangle to Cook, One Chef at a Time," had his hands full with 22 kids from 10 to 15.

"I've gotten two years of parenting experience in two weeks," said Goldfarb, with a chuckle.

But he found the kids were willing to learn when he could get their attention.

"We learned knife skills and how to organize our work space when we cook and we did some egg- and potato-based recipes, kind of breakfast, weekend-type foods," he said of the first day. "Some of them wanted more vegetable dishes and some wanted more meats."

While all the children studied the same topics and used similar ingredients, "there were different sophistication of

recipes," Goldfarb said of the two groups. The 10- to 12-year-olds took their classes in the morning, while the 13-to-15-year olds had afternoon sessions,

The children, who came from Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, Cary, Clayton and Hillsborough -- there was even one from South Carolina -- made tofu and fruit smoothies and a tropical fruit gazpacho, among other things.

Simone Booker of Durham, who will attend Jordan High School in the fall, said she "wanted something to do before" she left town for the summer.

"I love cooking," the 14-year-old said. "I've been cooking forever. My grandma cooks and I cook with my mom and we have dinner parties and stuff."

Booker, who really enjoys baking and has a dynamite chocolate cake recipe, "Googled" her way into this camp.

"We just looked on [online search tool] Google for cooking camps and this one popped up," she said.

Maybe that explains the eclectic nature of Goldfarb's student body this summer.

"We've had kids from all over The South," he said. "We had one from Kentucky, one from Georgia, and this week one from South Carolina. They were looking for this kind of program and there was nothing in their area."

The youngsters were on a field trip when I hooked up with them, traveling by bus into Chatham County to Celebrity Dairy, where there are lots of goats.

We tasted goat's milk and goat cheese and had a lunch that included potato salad made with potatoes chopped by the kids. Emeril Lagasse couldn't have done a neater job.

Then we headed over to Periwinkle Farm, where the children helped harvest fresh red potatoes. Finally they visited Weaver Street Market and the Carrboro Farmers' Market, where most bought some of the potatoes they harvested just an hour before.

Earlier in the week, they learned the basics of recipe preparation, kitchen organization and timing, as well as the fundamentals of nutrition and food safety.

"Tuesday was healthy cooking day and they met Alesa Eanes, our registered dietitian, who gave a brief lecture and took them on a tour of the Kroger grocery across the street," Goldfarb said.

The group all came together for the field trip and then went back to their divided day on Thursday, learning to make fresh pasta. On Friday there were multi-course meals for the families. The younger kids prepared lunch and the older kids worked up a special dinner.

All went home with a little extra knowledge, an apron, a chef's knife and a book of recipes and cooking tips. Some returned this week for an advanced course of study emphasizing menu planning and creativity in the kitchen.

To me, that is good news. I'm glad they've learned how to take a step beyond a Big Mac and fries.

In July, Chez Bay Gourmet is partnering with Special Olympics and Special Populations to host a series called S.P.I.C.E -- Special Populations Inclusion Cooking Education, designed for athletes and participants.

Special Populations/Inclusion Division offers recreational and leisure programs for persons with physical and developmental disabilities. It also seeks to promote interaction with and inclusion in the community.

I have volunteered to teach "North Carolina barbecue and the trimmings" for a S.P.I.C.E. class on July 18, which is part of the Life Skills Development Program "Learning How to Cook." Other classes will be taught by Goldfarb, his staff and other volunteers, including Gourmet Club Members.

If you wish to contribute to the program, with a donation or as a volunteer, contact Tiffane Land at Durham Parks and Recreation, 306-4497.