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THE MAGAZINE**

FOOD

The Apprentices: The Dogwood Gourmet Institute helps turn around troubled lives with free restaurant training

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By: Mary K. Zajac

In the dim light of the Dogwood Restaurant in Hampden, Jennifer Brock tells her story to the small group assembled there. It's a story dully familiar to anyone with a passing awareness of recovery programs; heads nod as she recites a matter-of-fact litany: failed marriage, drug abuse, coming clean, relapse. She pauses only to remember her place or push an errant stray blonde hair behind her ear. When she finishes, the nearly fifty diners applaud, and Brock quickly makes her way to the side of the room to help Lou Gershen and Arthur Ruby Jr. scoop ice cream for dessert. She's visibly relieved to be finished speaking. "Ooh, that was awful," she whispers.

Gershen, a compact man with the build of a wrestler, quickly tells her, "You did alright!"

Brock, Gershen, and Ruby are among the first apprentices at the Dogwood Gourmet Institute, a nonprofit program run by Bridget and Galen Sampson. Based at the restaurant (with additional classes held in classrooms at Our Daily Bread Employment Center), the program, which can range in length from twelve to eighteen months, trains folks in transition from addiction, incarceration, and/or homelessness in all aspects of restaurant work, from front-of-the-house management to knife skills. According to the Sampsons, graduates of the program get a free restaurant education equivalent to the one doled out at the Culinary Institute of America, where Galen (a former Harbor Court Hotel executive chef) was trained.

"We wanted to help change the lives of people in difficult situations," explains Bridget. "And the restaurant business is a great training school on so many levels." The couple hopes to be approved for full nonprofit status for both the training program and the restaurant by the end of 2007. Their goal is to be 85 percent sustainable—that is, relying on few to no grants—by 2010.

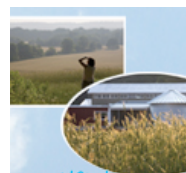
The sharing of the apprentices' stories is part of Fellowship Night, a monthly event at which parishioners of St. Ignatius Church (where the Sampsons are members) meet at Dogwood for a dinner prepared and served by the apprentices. On the buffet laid out on the bar, a giant bowl of salad greens purchased on a class trip to the Waverly Farmers' Market sits next to a tureen of mild-flavored vegetable chili full of chickpeas. Rounding out the meal are fluttering wings of farfalle pasta mixed with sliced chicken breast, red peppers, and onions. "We bought things that were beautiful," Brock says of the shopping trip—her first visit to a farmers' market.

This evening, the full plates and easy chatter translate into a show of moral support for both the Sampsons and the apprentices. It demonstrates the celebratory and redemptive nature of making food, the way that breaking bread forges relationships—themes that run through the program in small ways, from the class discussion of the film *Babette's Feast* to the cooking advice Galen gives in class that could double as life lessons.



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could double as life lessons.

"If you don't have a good foundation, you won't have good cuisine," he says in the classroom one afternoon as he explains the concept of mirepoix, the combination of carrots, onion, and celery that forms the basis of a stock. A soft-spoken, heavy-featured man, he urges his students to take the time to do a job properly: "If you don't solve it in the beginning, you'll have to deal with it later."

Later, Bridget tells me, "Galen has said, 'I'd rather create this program than be a renowned chef.'"

During Fellowship Night, the class stumbles over the French names of the chefs they've studied (for Escoffier, "think lingerie," jokes Gershen) and recounts recent trips to One Straw Farm—to see how organic produce is grown—and to Springfield Farms—to visit the hogs that come to the restaurant as bacon and pork loins. At one point, Ruby, an intense young man who's been clean for more than six years, offers this observation: "I always wondered why people prayed before meals. And when I asked people why, [they said] they prayed for the food, the farmers, the land." Visiting the farms, he continues, helped him put his "thoughts and well wishes behind the prayers. It helped me appreciate where it all comes from."

Many of the members of St. Ignatius plan to get involved in the Sampsons' program by teaching, tutoring, or even building a website. Kathleen Haser, executive director of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps East, hopes to send her volunteers here. "I completely believe in what Bridget and Galen are doing, and I've been following them for a long time," she says over orange juice and salad. "They would be excellent mentors."

Although what the Sampsons are doing is, on some levels, very basic—providing skills and jobs to people who are without them—their vision goes beyond teaching how to review an invoice or seat a customer. In addition to their relationship with St. Ignatius, the couple is creating a web of supportive connections with other nonprofit agencies. The Center for Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development sponsors a three-week "job readiness boot camp" for prospective Dogwood apprentices called STRIVE, and the Franciscan Center and the Christopher Place Employment Academy will be the recipients of meals prepared by the apprentices.

The strongest connection, however, may be among the apprentices themselves. Because many of them have fought or are fighting addiction, they are well prepared to understand each other's struggles. "[The other] apprentices want to know how many meetings I go to, whether I have a sponsor," explains Brock. "It's good to have people who care about me."

After the Fellowship dinner, the apprentices reflect on the purpose of the evening. "We're making the meal and serving the meal. It's the right thing to do," says Gershen. "It's a new way of thinking for me, as opposed to the other way, when I would ask 'What am I going to get?'"

According to Ruby, "It's really about maintaining hope, the karmic well wishes that people give towards the program. When I'm here, I'm thinking ahead about people who will be here, the people that are in jail now. And when they walk in here for the first time, I want to be here."

Brock casts the evening in a distinctly personal and philosophical light. "This is like a spiritual experience to me—to be around normal people who see what I've been and who I am, and will stick around to see what I become."

—Mary K. Zajac wrote about Maryland winemaking in October.

RECIPE

Andrew's Bouillabaisse, served with a Rouille Crostini
(Andrew Weinzirl is Dogwood's sous chef.)

For the fish stock (fume):

6 lbs fish bones with heads (Dogwood suggests grouper)
1½ gallons cold water
4 ounces diced onion
2 ounces diced celery
2 ounces diced leek
1 ounce butter
2 cups Chablis wine
1 bay leaf
1 oz curly parsley
¼ oz fresh thyme

Clean bones and heads in cold running water. Break the large bones. Remove any black skin, blood clots, and gills. Saute mirepoix (the onion, celery, and leek) and aromatics (herbs) in butter. Cover and let sweat in their own juices. Add fish bones, cover, and sweat for a few minutes. Add white wine and cover with cold water. Bring to a slow boil and reduce to a simmer. Simmer uncovered for up to 45 minutes. Pass through a fine strainer, cool, and refrigerate.

Yield: 1½ gallons of stock

For the broth:

- 3 Roma tomatoes, chopped
- ½ red onion, medium diced
- 1 leek, julienned
- 1 bulb fennel, julienned
- 2 stalks of celery
- 2 red peppers, roasted and medium diced
- 3 cloves of garlic, sliced
- 1 tablespoon orange zest
- 1 cup anisette (Pernod)
- Fume—enough to cover
- 1 tablespoon saffron

Sweat onion, leek, fennel, celery, peppers, garlic in olive oil until tender.

Add tomatoes and zest.

Deglaze with Pernod and saffron.

Add fume to cover.

Bring to boil, then turn heat down to a gentle simmer.

Simmer for an hour.

Crush with a whisk or potato masher, then strain.

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

Rouille for the crostini:

- 2 egg yolks
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 teaspoon saffron
- 1 tablespoon roasted red pepper
- ½ cup olive oil
- ½ cup vegetable oil

Combine first four ingredients in a food processor and blend. Slowly add oils to emulsify.

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

To prepare one serving of bouillabaisse:

- 2 clams
- 3 shrimp—peeled and deveined
- 3 tubes calamari
- 3 oz lump crabmeat
- 2 purple fingerling potatoes, quartered
- ¼ cup equal parts leek and fennel, julienned
- 2 cups broth

In a large round pan, bring broth to a simmer.

Add the potatoes, shrimp, clams, and calamari and cover.

Simmer until clams open up and shrimp is cooked through.

To serve:

In a large bowl, pile the potatoes and shellfish in the middle.

Ladle the broth over the mixture.

Garnish with crabmeat and julienned leeks and fennel.

Smother grilled slice of baguette with rouille.

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