

LTCC students create restaurant caliber 3-course meal

By Kathryn Reed

Skip breakfast and don't worry about needing dinner. The food is that plentiful and that good. Unfortunately, the opportunity to indulge in a three-course lunch for \$10 is going away soon.

Students in Lake Tahoe Community College's Principles and Practices of Intermediate Food Preparation are the servers, chefs, dish washers, meal planners, menu creators – you name it.



Salad and bread start the three-course meal on June 2 at LTCC.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

Part of their final project is working in groups of four or five to come up with a meal to serve to the public.

“We didn't announce the ones in the fall or winter because we

had enough sales. Then people in the public started asking about it and wanting to know about the lunches,” culinary arts instructor Steve Fernald said.

The room was full this week.

Fernald encouraged his students to consider having a vegetarian option, though not all took that advise. The students had to price out the menu, create a shopping list, design a menu and print it.

For four Wednesdays the students are creating an ensemble of dishes. This week it was all about Italy.

Sitting in the Creekside Dining Room at the college is like being on the edge of the forest. With all of the picture windows, diners feel like they are truly in Lake Tahoe and can easily forget they are on a campus of higher learning.

I’m taken to my seat by one of the students and handed that day’s menu. It’s in Italian and English, making me feel like I’m at a restaurant in North Beach in San Francisco perusing a prix fixe menu.

My beverage choices are lemonade or water. Clearly I’m not in The City because a glass of red wine is really what would have been perfect with this meal.

First course is Caesar salad and grilled ciabatta with pesto. This could have been a meal unto itself. The bread could have been cut a little thicker and the layer of pesto a little thinner. Still, the flavor was outstanding – the right mix of garlic and basil.

Three-meat lasagna with béchamel sauce was one entrée choice. I went with the vegetarian lasagna with homemade marinara sauce. The mix of vegetables was tasty, though the ricotta cheese was a bit on the thick side. The overall flavor, though, was yummy.



Vegetarian
lasagna

It came with a couple spoonfuls of sautéed spinach on the side. Aesthetically, this was the perfect presentation. A slice of the bread would have been a wonderful accompaniment.

And the portion – wow. I couldn't eat it all. Of course, I also knew tiramisu cheesecake was still to come. Several people were leaving the dining room with to-go containers.

The only trouble with the tiramisu is how full I was. Still, it didn't stop me from devouring nearly every morsel.

As the hour came to a close, the class came out for a brief introduction and rousing round of applause.

Two lunches remain. The one on June 9 has a Greek theme, while salmon is the focus of the June 16 meal. Per Fernald's instructions, all must be three courses and come with a beverage.

Reservations are necessary. Call Steve Fernald at (530) 541.4660, ext. 334 or email fernald@ltcc.edu.



Tiramisu
cheesecake

An added bonus is the students will share the recipes. The following is the tiramisu they made. The sheet of paper didn't say where the recipe originally came from. I can't attest for the ease or difficulty in making it, but I do know the end product is scrumptious.

Torta di Formaggio di Tiramisu (Tiramisu Cheesecake)

Serves 12-16

1-2 (3oz.) packages ladyfingers

8 T coffee or espresso

3 (8 oz.) packages cream cheese

1 (8 oz.) container mascarpone

$\frac{1}{4}$ C sour cream

1 C white sugar, plus 2 T

2 eggs

4 T all-purpose flour or cornstarch

1 (4 oz.) bar semisweet chocolate

4 T Kahlua

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Place a pan of water on the bottom of oven.

Remove bottom of 9 x 3-inch springform pan; wrap bottom with plastic wrap. Stir 6 T coffee (cooled), 2 T sugar and 2 T Kahlua in a shallow bowl until sugar dissolves. Quickly dip one side of the ladyfingers into coffee mixture and place wet side up on pan bottom to cover, squeezing in ladyfingers to fit. Use as many as needed. Freeze about 20 minutes or until firm. Lift plastic wrap, with ladyfingers, off pan bottom and place on a flat plate in freezer.

In a large bowl, mix cream cheese, mascarpone, sour cream, and sugar until very smooth. Add remaining 2 T coffee or espresso and remaining 2 T Kahlua, and mix. Add the eggs then add the flour once sifted; mix slowly until just smooth. The consistency of the mascarpone can vary. If the cheesecake batter is too thick, add a little cream. Do not overmix at this point. Pour batter into crust. (See recipe below for crust.)

Place pan on middle rack of oven. Bake 35 to 40 minutes, or until center still jiggles slightly when shaken. Turn off oven (leave door closed); leave cake in oven 20 minutes. Remove from oven, and let it finish cooling. Cover loosely; refrigerate at least 4 hours, preferably 1 day for best flavor. For chocolate shavings, pull a swivel-blade vegetable peeler down length of chocolate bar. Refrigerate curls until ready to use, or garnish slices individually when ready.

Graham cracker crust (for 9-inch pie crust)

About 20 honey graham crackers

6 T unsalted butter, melted

Break the graham crackers into smaller pieces. To turn those pieces into crumbs, you can use a food processor or blender. Pulse in short bursts until you've got coarse crumbs.

Pour the crumbs into a large mixing bowl, followed by the melted butter. Work the butter into the crumbs with a wooden spoon or your hands until the butter is evenly distributed.

Dump the mixture into a 9-inch springform pan or pie tin. Use your hands or a flat-bottomed glass to press the mixture evenly into the bottom and side (if desired) of the pan. To avoid crumbs getting into the batter, press firmly to ensure the crust is well compacted.

Bake the crust about 8-10 minutes. Let it cool completely

before adding the filling.