

LTCC students create temporary campus restaurant

By Kathryn Reed

It isn't quite like the Food Network's "Restaurant Impossible," but the challenge is probably the most difficult culinary test these budding chefs have had to execute.

Students in Steve Fernald's Food Preparation class at Lake Tahoe Community College are tasked with planning a three-course lunch menu that includes a beverage, make enough food for about 30 people, and have a vegetarian main dish available.

Two of the four teams have their work behind them. Now they are the servers and helpers for the remaining teams.

It was two years ago that Fernald last had students put on these types of lunches.

"It is based upon the fact that we have a great group of students this year who have proven to work hard and do good jobs at nearly every task that has been given to them. I am really proud of the effort, creativity and energy the students are putting into planning and executing their own lunches," Fernald told *Lake Tahoe News* why he brought the lunches back.



Spinach salad starts the three-course meal May 31 at Lake Tahoe Community College. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Anita Kasch, who is part of Team El Dorado, said her group brainstormed a couple times before coming up with their menu.

“When we decided on a Mexican theme, we searched for recipes and ideas online as well as in a couple of cookbooks. For the rice dish, for example, we had three or four recipes that we made in class as a team. We sampled them and decided which we liked and which we didn’t,” Kasch told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The one we liked the best we tweaked a little to make it our own and to make it better to fit on our plate. We went through this process with nearly every menu item, using trial and error to find what worked the best. It was all a real team effort.”

On May 31 it was Team Sierra’s turn to wow the crowd gathered at the college. They had about 3½ hours that morning to get the food ready.

Dressed in their white chef coats, two students greet Becca and I who check off our reservation and take our money. We are seated at a table that has a carafe of water on it. While Tahoe water is already delicious, this water has fresh limes, lemons and oranges in it to make it taste even more flavorful – and perhaps healthy.

Pull apart rosemary Parmesan bread is quickly brought to the table with olive oil-balsamic vinegar for dipping. Being able to pull it apart made it fun, and definitely different than just having slices of bread. Having it be light, airy and small pieces made it so we didn’t just fill up on bread and water.

Out comes the first course – spinach salad. It has red onions,

feta cheese, candied almonds, raisins and finely diced tomatoes. The presentation is superb and the amount perfect.

The flavor, though, well, we both thought it needed something more. The dressing tasted only like oil had been put on the greens and nothing more. Nuts in a salad like this are great, but the candied aspect made it too sweet.

While we had different entrees, our sides were the same – spaghetti squash, zucchini and asparagus. Mixing the spaghetti squash and zucchini together gave it the right flavor, while on their own they were just OK.

Becca had the steak rouladen – stuffed with collard greens, bacon and goat cheese, topped with a demi-glace wine reduction sauce.

I had the eggplant stuffed with herbed ricotta cheese, breaded and pan-fried.

Unfortunately, neither of us was thrilled with our entrée. Becca's meat was dry, and the bulk of my eggplant was left on the plate.

The dessert, a peanut butter custard with a chocolate crust topped with flambé bananas could have lost the bananas for better a presentation and less competing flavors.

The caramel on the dessert tasted like it could have been made from scratch. It was yummy.

“It is definitely an empowering form of education that has lit a fire under this group,” Fernald said of all of the students.

—

Note: To sign up for the June 7 or June 14 lunches, email fernalld@ltcc.edu. Seatings are at noon and 12:20pm. Cost is \$10. This includes a three-course lunch and creative drink. There is a set menu, but a vegetarian option can be ordered

when making the reservation.