

## HOLYOKE

# An immersion blender

Free HCC culinary program infuses language, job prep into curriculum

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A free 180-hour training designed for people learning English and seeking careers in the culinary and hospitality fields will begin Monday at the MGM Culinary Arts Institute at Holyoke Community College.

Moira Lozada, career advisor for English language learners at Holyoke Community College, said culinary and English teachers will work side by side.

“Students will have two instructors,” Lozada said.

The program offered by HCC builds in 90 hours of English along with career preparation.

“This hands-on training is an exciting opportunity for students to begin a new career in culinary and hospitality, advance into higher-level roles, or continue studying culinary and hospitality at the college level,” said Pesh Black, director of the English for Speakers of Other Languages program at HCC.

Students in the course will gain skills with cutlery, cooking, culinary math and measurements, workplace etiquette, resume building and job searching, and earn ServSafe workplace certifications for management, and food and alcohol handling.

“Our alumni have gone on to work in restaurants, food service, hotels and started their own entrepreneurial ventures,” said Black.

An evening class started two weeks ago and includes students who speak Spanish, Russian and Mandarin.

Immigration status has not been an issue for the



A Holyoke Community College course is still registering adult residents of Massachusetts who are intermediate English learners, aiming to prepare them for careers with businesses in state. (SUBMITTED PHOTO)

program, Lozada told The Republican.

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And while the program doesn't promise work after training ends, it does aim to fully prepare people for careers with businesses within state.

Kevin Lynn, executive director of MassHire Springfield Career Center, said culinary careers are in high demand now.

People are eating out more, since the COVID-19 pandemic requirements, such as masking, ended, he said.

“People were laid off initially, and some did not come back. Now, lots of restaurants are coming back, and new restaurants are opening in the area,” Lynn said.

MassHire partners with companies like MGM and Snap Chef, which have different needs; MGM is looking to fill fast-paced restaurant kitchen positions, while Snap Chef has openings for corporate cafeteria jobs.

A livelihood in the culinary arts field is great for the right person, because they can climb up the career ladder quickly, Lynn said.

The HCC program assists students in their job searches, with resources, resumes, interviewing techniques, elevator pitches and talking about their skills and qualifications. The program also stays tapped into the needs of local eateries.

“We work with over two dozen local employers eager to hire qualified graduates as food preparers, line cooks, servers, bartenders, hosts and hostesses, and hotel workers,” said Black.

In addition, the program's students are scheduled to take two field trips. The first trip will be to an MGM kitchen, and the second one is to be announced but likely will be a mom-and-pop restaurant, Lozada said. The main reason for the tours is so students can see if the culinary and hospitality career is right for them.

“Cooking at home and cooking in a fast-paced restaurant are two different things,” Lozada said.

Skills, training and education programs like the one at HCC are a part of a state program called MassSTEP, funded with \$40,000 through the state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.