

NEW DIGS FOR ASPIRING CHEFS

At Holyoke Community College. **BUSINESS, B5**



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A culinary 'Cadillac'

New institute to train aspiring chefs draws admiration, acclaim

By BERA DUNAU
@BeraDunau

HOLYOKE — For a student learning the ins and outs of cooking, one of the newest additions at Holyoke Community College is a dream come true.

The HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute, which opened in downtown Holyoke in January as the new home for the college's culinary arts program, is a \$7.5 million mecca to fledgling chefs.

"This is wonderful," said Carl King, a student in the program.

"A Pinto to a Cadillac," continued King, in comparing it to the program's previous facility.

Located at 164 Race St., the 21,000-square-foot space features state-of-the-art cooking appliances, and computer and video technology that is deployed in both the classroom and the kitchen. The cost of the facility, including equipment, was funded by money from the state, city, federal, college and community mitigation funds from MGM Springfield, which this fall will open its new casino complex in Springfield.

"The size ... (of) our facility has grown tremendously," said Warren Leigh, chairman of the hospitality and culinary arts department at HCC.

The previous facility was located on HCC's campus, while the new one is located off-campus by the Connecticut River. While the previous facility contained a kitchen and a bakery, the new facility contains four kitchens and a bakery. It also has a student lounge, classrooms, walk-in refrigeration and a dining area.

"It's amazing," said Michael Wellspeak, who graduated from the program about six years ago and visited the facility Wednesday. "It's something ... most chefs dream of."

Wellspeak said that when he was looking at culinary programs, he felt HCC provided both the best quality and value.

"This place just kind of screamed my name," said Wellspeak.

Leigh said that having the facility off-campus has fostered excitement and pride among his students.



Students Dustin Covey of Westfield, left, Kathryn Campbell of Belchertown and Kelly Miller of Westfield watch as Warren Leigh, hospitality and culinary arts department chairman, right, demonstrates how to properly top a pizza last week at the Holyoke Community College's MGM Culinary Arts Institute in Holyoke.



Michael Serrano of Springfield, center, stretches pizza dough Wednesday.



The exterior of the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute on Race Street in Holyoke is shown Wednesday.

"They really feel like this is their school," he said.

One of the kitchens in the facility is the test kitchen, which has cameras and monitors that allow for broadcasting and recording of lessons. Leigh said that this will al-

low people to engage with lessons at any time.

"There's so many ways we could use that technology," he said.

Not all changes at the program are physical either. A new, two-semester culinary arts certificate

will premiere in the fall, while an associate of applied science in culinary arts degree is currently in the works, which will be a four-semester program. This degree is set to replace

Culinary institute in full swing at HCC

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the associate in food service management that the program currently offers. The program also offers noncredit courses in everything from gourmet baking to TIPS certification, also known as training and intervention procedures for servers of alcohol.

Credit and noncredit students can take classes at the facility simultaneously, something that was not possible at the previous facility.

Leigh estimates that there are 60 credit students and 20 noncredit students currently in the program. He said that the certificate program prepares people to be able to take a job as a line cook in a restaurant, while the associate degree prepares graduates to become lead line cooks.

"You're really ready to be a supervisor," he said.

Those in the certificate program can also seamlessly transition into the associate degree program following completion, as it contains prerequisites for the program.

"I think it gives you that leg up," said Leigh, on the advantage of going to college for culinary training, as opposed to working up through the industry without it.

Leigh also noted that there's been an increase in people signing up for the program since the new facility opened.

Program director Michele Cabral says part of that increase is being fueled by completion program agreements HCC has established with a number of institutions, including the University of Massachusetts. These agree-



Kathryn Campbell of Belchertown tops pizza dough last week at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute in Holyoke.

city, MGM has also begun to hold auditions for culinary positions at the Springfield resort.

"They're utilizing the kitchen space right now," Cabral said.

She also said that MGM has consulted on the curriculum, so that graduates will be prepared for the industry.

The students interviewed at the facility were pleased with the new facility.

Vivian Martinez is finishing her associate in food service management this semester, and will get her associate in business technology.

"I love this new facility," she said.

She is looking to open up her own catering business



A personal pizza made at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute is shown.

open up his own restaurant.

Amber Duby, 20, is in the middle of completing her certificate and will be going for her associate degree. She plans on opening up her own

is to become an instructor at HCC.

He wouldn't be alone in having hands-on, real-world experience, as the instructors at HCC all have restaurant

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