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Susan Welch/CCCC photo

Venue for culinary artists . . .

Central Carolina Community College's Cougar Café at its Lee County Campus, is run by faculty and students in the college's Culinary Arts Department. Open only to CCCC students, employees and guests, it provides a venue for culinary arts students to work with the skills and knowledge they have learned. Pictured (front, from left) are student Christian Martinez and lead instructor Regina Minter, both of Lee County; and (back, from left) Christopher Bushek, Jamie Fitzgerald, Ryan Wester and Marcus McSwain, all of Chatham County.

Thursday

Chatham News/Record

Cougar Cafe tasty extension at CCCC

SANFORD – Organic lettuces with oriental vinaigrette, towering club sandwiches of roast chicken, bacon and fresh produce, and tortilla wraps flavored with the piquant spices of Mexico are just a few of the items on the menu at Central Carolina Community College's Cougar Café.

Now under the management of the college's Culinary Arts Department, the Cougar Café has become a venue for culinary students to learn and practice their skills, while providing delicious food to CCCC students, faculty, and guests of the college.

Chef Gregg Hamm, chair of the Hospitality and Culinary Arts Department at CCCC

describes the café as a hands-on learning experience leading to a certificate in Culinary Fundamentals. The certificate is just one of the programs of study on the path to an Associate of Applied Science in Hospitality and Culinary Arts.

"The café offers a service to the college, and students are able to gain hands-on experience," Hamm said. "All the menu items are homemade, using techniques taught in class. All meals are \$5, and there are daily specials based on seasonal foods and the specific skills being taught in class, such as making stock into soup, knife cuts used in making salads, sautéing and much more."

In addition, safety and sani-

tation are being taught at the Cougar Café. Students must learn how to prepare food at the right temperature and handle it properly, Hamm said.

Student Christopher Bushek, who recently retired from the Marine Corps, is one of the students in the culinary program. A world traveler, Bushek has visited Japan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman, Philippines, Greenland, Australia, New Zealand and other places.

"No matter where you are in the world, there is something that is local," he said, then added jokingly, "The idea is to combine the freshest ingredients and your cooking skills

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Tasty

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and try not to mess it up.”

Students rotate through all of the food service jobs at the café – cashier, grill, flat top, cold bar, hot bar, and expeditor (the last person to make sure the food is good before it goes out to the customer).

“I’m a very hands-on person,” Bushek said. “I like the immersion factor of the teaching technique at the Cougar Café. You really get a holistic view of what is happening in a kitchen. When you’re finished with the 16-week Culinary Fundamentals Certificate, you’re able to walk into any restaurant kitchen and know what you’re doing.”

Lead instructor Regina Minter-Hargett graduated from Johnson and Wales University’s Culinary Arts program in Charlotte, where Chef Hamm is also an alumnus. Minter was one of Hamm’s students in the culinary program at Lee Senior High School, in Sanford.

“Chef Hamm was my inspiration to attend Johnson and Wales,” Minter said. “Now we are working together helping other students who want a career in food service, especially focusing on the farm-to-table concept, which is one of the fastest-growing ideas in the industry.”

Established in 2010, CCCC’s Culinary Arts Department (which added curriculum in 2013) is based in Chatham County, yet serves students through continuing education and curriculum in all three of the college’s service counties, Chatham, Harnett and Lee.

The curriculum provides specific training required to prepare students to assume positions as culinary professionals in a variety of food service settings, including full service restaurants, hotels, resorts, clubs, catering operations, contract food service, and health facilities with a sustainable and farm-to-table focus. It emphasizes

specific training required to prepare students to assume positions as culinary professionals in a variety of foodservice settings, including full service restaurants, hotels, resorts, clubs, catering operations, contract food service, and health facilities with a sustainable and farm-to-table focus. It emphasizes practical application, sustainable practices and professionalism.

Students who complete the program are able to demonstrate excellence in designing and pricing a menu, fundamental cooking methods, executing an off-site catered meal, healthy cooking practices according to industry standards, identifying trends in culinary arts with a focus on farm-to-table cuisine and general skills required for success in the culinary profession.

The CCCC Hospitality and Culinary Arts program offers an Associate in Applied Science degree and curriculum certificates in Culinary Fundamentals and Farm to Table Entrepreneurship, as well as the Natural Chef Continuing Education Certification.

In addition to his duties as department chair of the Hospitality and Culinary Arts program at CCCC, Chef Gregg Hamm owns and operates two restaurants specializing in southern cuisine and farm to table freshness, Café 121 in Cary and Café 121 in Sanford. He is opening a new location in downtown Raleigh called P.G. Werth's, which is named after his inspiring culinary arts teacher.

For more information, on the Hospitality and Culinary Arts program at CCCC, contact Chef Gregg Hamm at 919-545-8070, e-mail him at g Hamm@cccc.edu, or visit www.cccc.edu/culinaryarts for further information.