

# COOKING UP CAREERS

*Livingston Food Resource Center  
provides new culinary course*

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In recent weeks in the gleaming kitchen of the Livingston Food Resource Center, four culinary students have been learning more than how to cook professional, savory dishes — they are learning how to combine the ingredients for a better life.

The Food Resource Center is deep into its first "Cook Up a Career" course, a 10-week-long program designed to prepare people for careers in food service.

For Tuesday night's class, each student crafted their own rice pilaf and learned the finer details of cooking artisan and heirloom varieties of rice.

Meanwhile, the class instructor, Chef Ryan Cotterell, head chef for Livingston HealthCare, also cooked up a more exotic rich, purple-colored grain known as an heirloom violet rice from the Philippines. Students sampled the rice straight from the pot, and



A bit of plated heirloom violet rice from the Philippines is pictured during a "Cook Up A Career" class at the Livingston Food Resource Center on Tuesday night.

then again flavored with sauces. From the exercise, students learned rice can go far beyond bland "Minute Made" rice.

Culinary student Hannah Little added some sour cream to her pilaf for a creamy texture, while student Ron Postelwait garnished his pilaf plate with a bay leaf. Lynette Gray mixed up "the flavor profile," as Cotterell put it, by spicing up her dish.

"I always liked cooking, but never had an opportunity like this," said Gray.

Chef Cotterell then sampled and critiqued his students' creations accordingly.

"I'm trying to show the different levels of flavor,"

said Cotterell. In the process, "You're helping people develop to get better jobs," he added.

Michael McCormick, executive director of the food center, said he saw the opportunity for the course after doing some market research through the Montana Job Service. He discovered nearly 20 percent of job openings were food service-type positions. After interviewing area restaurant owners, he learned their biggest obstacle in hiring is finding people trained enough to jump right into the job.

McCormick said about 80 percent of people utilizing the center for food assistance are in the midst

of looking for employment opportunities.

"You put the need and the supply together, we've got a pretty good equation," McCormick said. "There is always a high demand for restaurant cooks."

And it shows. McCormick said some students are already reporting success in job advancement.

The course goes well beyond the boiled-down basics of cooking, providing serve-safe certification, kitchen cleaning techniques and exercises in customer services skills. Culinary student Greg Garlough, who works at McDonald's restaurant, said he has aspirations to open his own health food restaurant some day.

"I have a heart condition and want to change my lifestyle," he said.

With the course still in its experimental first run, McCormick said the food center has fully subsidized the tuition for this first batch of students. He hopes the center will hold at least two such 10-week courses a year, depending on the demand.

"The people in this first session are really inspirational," said McCormick. "They see the opportunity to develop a career and are understanding the benefits that come with it. We're learning together."