



Culinary Arts Instructor Partners with the Town and Local Business

When culinary arts instructor Don Dickey of West Hartford decided to start a new business he had no idea where it would lead. Using ties that span several decades with LifeLearn, the town's continuing education program, he had to be creative to get things started. The concept was simple enough: combine a traditional catering business with cooking lessons. The problem was that he wanted guests at a cooking party to be able to enjoy wine with dinner, something that is not possible in his classroom at Hall High School. This led to discussions

with local businesses that had a kitchen and might be willing to host a party. He quickly found out that kitchen designers have beautiful facilities but nothing works: the stoves are not connected to gas or electricity, and sinks have no water or working drains. This situation was repeated at kitchen showrooms all over greater Hartford. The lack of a usable location put the whole project in limbo.

Persistence paid off when Dickey found Holland Kitchens and Baths in West Hartford's "Design District." Holland's owner Jim Corthouts was enthusiastic from the start to work with Dickey and LifeLearn and host cooking parties for the town and Party to Cook in his showroom which had a working kitchen. This new relationship had the potential to be mutually beneficial to all three organizations as well as the residents who would come and enjoy the parties.

With an arrangement in place, LifeLearn staff advertised the parties as continuing education classes in their fall catalog and on their web site at www.whlifelearn.org. Within days of the posting, the classes started to fill up. This wasn't too surprising. Dickey has been teaching for LifeLearn since the mid-80's and his classes are often among the first with a wait list. Many students are repeat customers who enjoy his enthusiastic teaching style.

Last spring, Dickey began teaching a cooking program at Hall High he calls "Culinary Essentials." This curriculum was developed specifically for beginners and focused on the basics like beef stew, roast chicken, and pasta. Cooking parties have several key features that distinguish them from Culinary Essentials. Besides starting with an appetizer, more intricate entrées with wine reduction sauces are now possible as are dishes with that dramatic flambé finish. He also features more advanced menus at the parties, including classics like steak Diane, veal (and chicken) piccata, and a more contemporary Asian shrimp over vegetable fettuccini in a spicy peanut sauce. Coffee and desserts are included as well.

West Hartford won't be alone in the cooking party business. Next year Party to Cook will also host events for Farmington and Middletown. Clients can also have a private cooking party at home or in a rented kitchen. The new company hopes this becomes a trend for birthdays, showers, fundraisers, corporate team building events, or just for fun.

For more info visit www.PartyToCook.com

