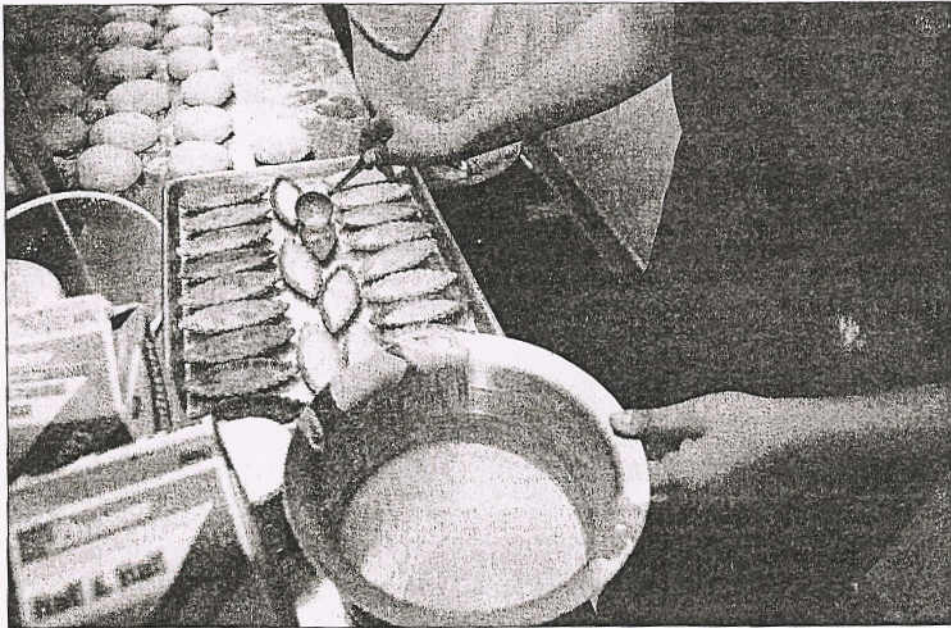


SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Culinary **JUSTICE**

Young offenders take to the kitchen in unique program



A cooking student at Dominican Hospital works on desserts.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

By **PEGGY TOWNSEND**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

In earlier days, the tall boy with the black watch cap shoved down almost to his eyebrows might have left Juvenile Hall and gone right back to the place that got him in trouble.

Instead, the teenager is in the kitchen, preparing salmon seared with Pacific Rim spices for 40 people.

Surrounded by boxes of mushrooms and bags of garlic, the boy deftly works the spicy rub mixture through his fingers, checking the recipe to make sure the proportions are right.

"I tell you, this will open doors for me," said the young man as he practiced his culinary skills. "I don't even know what the possibilities are."

The boy, who's name cannot be given because of juvenile justice rules, is part of an innovative program sponsored by the county Probation Department, designed to get young criminals out of jail and into the community — and keep them there.

The program, which is funded by the federal government, sends all but the worst offenders home, where they must pay restitution to their victims, get tutoring and counseling, and get a job. It also aims to make sure



Dominican's executive chef Shawn Stanchfield cooked up the idea for the young offenders to join him in the kitchen.

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kids don't end up back in Juvenile Hall.

The benefit, officials say, is that the county not only saves money by having fewer kids in the Hall, but nonviolent offenders have a better chance at rehabilitation.

In this case, it's salmon and sushi keeping kids straight.

Dominican Hospital, in cooperation with the Probation Department, is hosting a 16-week culinary school for kids who are on probation for things like vandalism and drug use. The idea is to teach them a skill that can lead to a good-paying job.

"I got in a little trouble," says a boy with a buzz haircut who admits school was not something he particularly liked.

"This showed me a better outlook for my career," he says, dumping a pot of steaming pasta into a strainer.

"And hopefully, it will get my foot in the door for a job."

If you build it...

The idea for a cooking school sparked to life two years ago when Tara Fisher, a deputy probation officer, and Shawn Stanchfield, executive chef at Dominican Hospital, met at a job fair.

Stanchfield, who studied under master chef Sam Choy in Hawaii and ran his own restaurant in Scottsdale, Ariz. before coming to Santa Cruz, had worked with at-risk kids before.

"I knew a little attention and guidance goes a long way with them," he says of kids.

"I knew if I built a program, they would come."

He approached Dominican Hospital officials who not only agreed to purchase the food for the program, but also granted the group the use of its kitchen after hours as part of its community outreach commitment, says Denise Fritsch, food services manager at the hospital.

Stanchfield agreed to volunteer his time.

The first day, six teenagers filed into the kitchen, scuffing their feet on the floor, all of them as silent as a desert night.

"That first day, I told every joke I could, and they just sat there staring at me," says Stanchfield, as the kids jostle around him.

"Now, they're just knocking it out."

Stanchfield taught the kids, ages 15-18, how to use knives and how to make stocks and soups. They made sushi and bread and filleted a fish.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Young hands busy themselves with pastries and rolls in the Dominican Hospital kitchen.

They even learned the French method of service.

But most importantly, they learned to show up, he says.

Kids who admitted to hating school or having trouble getting to class, made it to every session of the cooking class, because they wanted to do it.

"We taught them life skills — consistency and the ability to show up," Stanchfield says.

In the high-pressure world of culinary arts, that's one of the most important assets to have, he says.

A new direction

Before the new programs that focused on getting juvenile offenders out of the Hall and into their homes for rehabilitation, Juvenile Hall sometimes ran at 150 percent of capacity, according to figures from the Probation Department.

But in the last seven years, that has changed.

In 1997, Fisher says, the average daily population of Juvenile Hall was 47 kids.

Now, it's 27.

And of all the young lawbreakers sent home, only 2 percent have committed new offenses while awaiting resolution of their cases, she

says.

"Our department focuses on restorative justice," Fisher says. The idea is that while kids who are violent or dangerous will still be locked up, those who aren't will be given the tools to become productive members of society.

The cooking class is one part of it, and one that Fisher considers a success.

Of the six kids who started the program, six graduated, Fisher says.

The young cooks will now be offered internships at local high-end restaurants and at Dominican, thanks to Stanchfield who reached out to other chefs for the program.

In fact, as the kids prepare their four-course graduation dinner for their families and officials from Dominican Hospital and the Probation Department, chefs Beth Robideaux of Michael's on Main and Uriah Paiva of the UCSC Inn show up to lend a hand with the sushi and lemon meringue tarts.

And the kids are hustling.

They drizzle olive oil over garlic bulbs, squirt meringue on tarts and rinse rice for sushi.

"Excuse me," they say as they carry trays of food through the narrow kitchen space.

"Hot pot," they call.

"I want to be a sushi master," says one 16-

year-old with a quick grin. "I love sushi and I'm Asian, so I think that would go well for me."

This program has got him thinking, he says. Someday, he'd like to open his own sushi restaurant.

Next to him, a shy teenager says she's thinking of combining a career in cooking and massage after taking the class.

"Maybe on a cruise ship," she says.

Another boy says he now wants to try his hand at the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco.

Stanchfield shows a petite girl with curly hair how to prepare garlic for roasting.

She watches carefully, then starts trimming the plump white bulbs.

She used to cut school a lot, she says, but the cooking program has made her understand what she has to do to graduate.

"You have to be here every week if you want to learn," she says, wielding a sharp chef's knife with the skill of a professional. "You have to keep coming," she says.

"It's the same with school."

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