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Students learn the business of baking

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Jillian Stern's creation: a hot chocolate cupcake with whipped cream frosting, chocolate shavings and marshmallows on top.

The freshman in Westlake High School's Blue Arrow Cafe advanced culinary arts class won the fall recipe competition at Sweet Arleen's bake shop in Westlake Village with her original recipe. The cupcake will be the shop's featured flavor in December.

TASTY TREATS—Westlake High School senior Aaron Semain, right, jokes with Julia San Bartolome, executive pastry chef at Sweet Arleen's, as he frosts a cupcake during Arleen Scavone's visit with the Blue Arrow Cafe culinary class at Westlake High School on Oct. 7. Photos by RICHARD GILLARD/Acorn Newspapers

Culinary arts teacher Maria Scirone invited bakery owner Arleen Scavone and executive pastry chef Julia San Bartolome, twotime winners of Food Network's "Cupcake Wars" challenge, to the WHS class on Oct. 7 to give students advice about baking and following their passion into the kitchen.

"Red velvet has to be perfect or it's not good," Scavone told students about the cake whose ingredients include cocoa powder, vinegar and vanilla. Later, San Bartolome showed students how to ice the dessert with a tube of buttercream frosting.

Scavone, who also works in banking, tested cupcake recipes for a year before opening Sweet Arleen's in November 2009. She said persistence and passion are keys to success in any career.

The shop's newest employee began asking Scavone for a job when she was 15.

"I told her the earliest I could hire her is 16," Scavone said.

Undeterred, the girl stopped by the bakery every other week to greet Scavone and called the baker the day she turned 16.

"I didn't have anything I had to hire her for, but because she was so persistent and so passionate about wanting to be there, I (hired her)," the owner said.



COOKING UP A CAREER— Arleen Scavone, owner of Sweet Arleen's, talks with Westlake High students in an advanced culinary arts class.

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“You have to be passionate. Every day you have to wake up and take control or you let others do it for you. Whatever you want to do, you better go for it,” Scavone said.

San Bartolome, who attended the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, advised students interested in pursuing a culinary career to work at a hotel.

“In a hotel there are all different sorts of food production if you’re not sure what specialty to go into,” said the chef, who begins baking at Sweet Arleen’s at 4 a.m.

Blue Arrow Cafe, added to the curriculum last year, gives students the tools to achieve anything they want in the culinary world, said Laurie Looker, career coordinator.

Students first take two beginning food courses then learn how to handle knives, and prepare and present food. Outside the classroom, they observe food preparation at local hotels and get acquainted with the culinary programs at Oxnard College and Santa Barbara City College, Looker said.

The chefs-in-training also use textbooks from Johnson and Wales University, where famed chef Emeril Lagasse developed his kitchen skills, and earn a ServSafe certificate that allows them to work in restaurants, Scirone said.

Twice a month, students will sell lunches to faculty. The first menu on Oct. 20 will include a pesto grilled cheese sandwich, a salad and an “everything cookie” for \$6. Students follow a recipe, but they may alter it after taste testing. Future menu items will include three-cheese penne pasta, glazed meatloaf and tortilla soup.

“This kind of program is so important because we’re trying to get students to understand the connection between the skills they’re learning at school and how they can apply it to their career,” Looker said. “It provides the platform for making decisions about their post-secondary choices.”

Scavone was the first in a series of guest speakers Scirone plans to bring to class. Donna Skidmore, home economist at Dole Foods, is scheduled for the spring semester.

Erin Mann, 17, said she plans to be a pilot but loves to bake in her spare time.

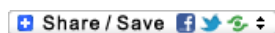
“It’s a hobby,” the senior said. “This is something good to have under your belt. I bake all the time and bring a batch of cookies to school. It’s an easy way to put a smile on somebody’s face. I enjoy it.”

Jillian, 14, hopes to attend the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y., after high school.

This year, former Blue Arrow student Cory McNerney, who graduated from WHS last year, enrolled at the Art Institute of California-Los Angeles and plans to open his own restaurant, Scirone said.

“I’m fortunate to be with such a great group of kids who are really enthusiastic about (the class),” she said.

[Return to top](#)



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