

# What's cooking?

Photos by Chris Menees, Messenger Staff Reporter

## OCCHS' culinary arts classes whetting appetites for learning

By CHRIS MENEES  
Staff Reporter

Something special is cooking at Obion County Central High School.

Unique culinary arts classes started several years ago are whetting students' appetites for learning in a non-traditional classroom setting — the kitchen.

The classes are continuing to gain in popularity, according to teacher Michelle Bruner.

"They work very hard," she said of the students in her Culinary Arts I and II classes. "And they really enjoy it."

Mrs. Bruner said she formerly taught traditional home economics classes and found that enrollment in foods and nutrition classes was growing. She enjoyed cooking and was eager to take on the challenge of teaching strictly culinary arts, which resulted in her attending a summer program at a culinary arts school and obtaining a food management endorsement through the University of Tennessee at Martin.

"There was an interest when (the late) Mr. (Bill) Hampton was principal to start this class and my numbers have grown," she said, adding that the school would eventually like to add a more advanced Culinary III class which would be work-based.

The traditional home economics classes at OCCHS are taught by Amy Montgomery and also continue to be popular with students.

The culinary arts curriculum starts with such basics as learning knife skills the first year and progresses to much more complex culinary techniques by the second year. Students learn through both book work — with individual chapters often focusing on certain food groups — and through hands-on instruction in a spacious classroom kitchen outfitted with shiny stainless equipment.

The instruction goes beyond cooking in also teaching students about healthy options in their food preparation.

Mrs. Bruner said the culinary arts classes are more in-depth than traditional home economics type cooking classes. For example, second-year students may find themselves making various gourmet sauces and even their own homemade mayonnaise.

Word of the students' culinary skills has spread and they have been invited to prepare food for many special events — such as district tournament hospitality rooms, various banquets, principals' breakfasts and school board meetings.

Two years ago, students did a presen-

tation on cholesterol and prepared food at CBK and Mrs. Bruner said the students have been invited back for another presentation there in a few days.

"It's good for the students to get out and do this type of presentation," she said.

Mrs. Bruner said the students especially enjoy the days they get to spend in the kitchen doing actual food preparation — whether it's from a recipe they've found online themselves or from a recipe she has selected in an effort to challenge their skills.

The students prepare many different dishes — from appetizers to full themed dinners for their teachers — and keep a recipe box with items they have prepared during the semester.

"Sometimes they are things they wouldn't necessarily choose," Mrs. Bruner said.

Students have found themselves preparing recipes with such ingredients as artichoke hearts or eggplant — foods they initially thought they wouldn't like but soon discovered they actually did like.

"They try different foods," she said.

When students are not preparing foods for special events, they are preparing dishes for class assignments, which affords them the opportunity to sample one another's culinary delights. Taste isn't the only thing considered for making the grade and students are also judged on things like presentation and garnish.

Students are also occasionally challenged to create their own recipes.

The culinary arts classes have drawn both male and female students who are eager to hone their cooking skills — whether it's for personal improvement in the kitchen or in preparation for a career in culinary arts — and who take the class very seriously. Mrs. Bruner said she is amazed how many students tell her they even watch programming on the Food Network.

She said the students work very well together and she often places them in groups where they won't necessarily always work with the same people.

"And they get really close to one another, because they have to figure things out together and they learn a lot from each other. It's really a wide, wide range of what they can do," she said. "They work really well in the kitchen."

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**CHOP, CHOP** — Obion County Central High School junior Madison Brown (front) chopped a yellow pepper as she and fellow junior Casey Goff prepared a delicious sausage won-ton appetizer during Culinary Arts II class Tuesday at the school's kitchen classroom. She will be involved in a state contest next month.



**CAUSING A STIR** — OCCHS junior Nick Heuer (left) stirred a pan of meat as he and Chris Winkle, a sophomore, conferred about their dish during class. Heuer said he enjoys cooking, while Winkle is interested in being a chef.



**GOING GREEN** — Culinary arts teacher Michelle Bruner watched Tuesday morning as student Chris Winkle used a colorful green herb to garnish a dish as he put the finishing touches on an appetizer he helped prepare.



**FOOD FOR THOUGHT** — Among the Culinary Arts II students who completed delicious appetizers during class Tuesday morning were (from left, seated) Stephanie Glisson, James Kennedy, Crosser, Bradley Modlin, Nick Heuer, Casey Goff, Madison Brown, Lauren Smith, Jonathon Hanks, (back row) CJ Miller, Cody Thomason, Chrysten Brewer, Clint Tibbs and Will McBride. Not pictured is Laykon Butler.



**WELL DONE** — OCCHS seniors Will McBride (left) and Clint Tibbs checked the doneness of a pizza-type egg roll they prepared during their Culinary Arts II class Tuesday morning. The two young men are cousins and both enjoy cooking. They will compete in April in a state competition with a healthy lasagna they created for a Food Innovations division. It substitutes ground turkey for beef.



**CLEAN-UP** — With cooking comes the inevitable clean-up afterward, and it's not any different for culinary arts students at OCCHS. Student Stephanie Glisson dried dishes as another student washed following some hands-on time in the kitchen to prepare appetizers.



**A-PEEL'ING** — Laykon Butler, a senior, peeled an avocado as she prepared guacamole for an appetizer. She said the culinary arts classes have taught her to be open-minded about food.