

Auberle showcases its culinary arts program

By PATRICK CLOONAN,
Daily News Staff Writer
06/04/2009



Sebastian P. makes his way through the buffet line with parents Derek and Mara during Wednesday's Auberle luncheon.
(Photo by Jennifer R. Vertullo / Daily News)

It clearly gave new meaning to the phrase "fruits of one's labors."

The menu at a McKeesport lunch Wednesday included melon wrapped with prosciutto, chilled strawberry soup, spinach salad with cantaloupe, baked fish with fruit salsa and pork tenderloin with orange glaze.

There was roast chicken with rosemary, lemon and sage, as well as sweet and sour meatballs, sweet potatoes, green beans, strawberry shortcake and banana pudding.

And while the master of ceremonies said the theme of the day was fruit, it wasn't a local audition for "Iron Chef."

It was a celebration of the end of the school year for Auberle's center along Hartman Street and O'Neil Boulevard.

"Today's theme was fruit, lots and lots of fruit," culinary arts instructor Jim Booker said.

"It highlights things the kids have learned," said Tim Kelly, a teen supervisor in Auberle's community residential program.

The luncheon involved five students who took a 16-week course involving 11 1/2 hours on Mondays in the classroom and 11 1/2 hours on Thursday in the lab ... the kitchen, if you like.

"We have never had a student who did not pass," Booker said.

Students can work their way toward a state "safe serve certified" status.

"It is a sanitation license to cook in the kitchen," said Les, a student who has his "safe serve" certificate.

"Every restaurant in the state is supposed to have, at all times, a 'safe serve certified' person," Booker explained.

As Auberle CEO John Lydon pointed out, the luncheon was a demonstration of the potential the students have, a potential tapped in "experiential learning" in which "kids learn by doing."

"Auberle is a great, great institution here in McKeesport, and it keeps getting bigger," said Mark Matich, territorial manager for Reinhart Food Service of East Huntingdon Township, Auberle's food supplier for the past decade.



During Wednesday's Auberle luncheon, Les F., Adam C. and Darin W. serve culinary treats to James Davis III. (Jennifer R. Vertullo)

Big enough to have contracts to provide services in 10 counties, most of them in the Pittsburgh area, but there also is a pact with Lehigh County at the eastern end of the state.

"We have a relationship with them where they have sent us a number of kids," Lydon said.

Auberle has 108 students at the center along Hartman Street, with eight other youngsters involved within McKeesport city limits. Statewide, Auberle serves the families of 1,600 youngsters.

It does so with a staff of 294.

Despite an expected budget crunch from Harrisburg and reduced contributions from the private sector, Lydon said "we've grown 20 percent this year and created 85 extra jobs." Auberle dates back to the establishment of the Pauline Auberle Memorial Foundation in 1948. Its main campus in McKeesport opened its doors in 1952.

Pauline Auberle wiled money and land to the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh for what started out as a home for boys but today deals with abused, neglected and troubled boys and girls.

While he was bishop of Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C.'s Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl was heavily involved in Auberle, as was Glassport native and Auxiliary Bishop Paul J. Bradley, who is being installed Friday as new bishop of Kalamazoo, Mich.

Lydon said Bishop David A. Zubik continues the tradition.

"He is as committed as Bishop Wuerl was," he said. "And that's big time." Lydon said Zubik was unable to stay for an event last November at Auberle. So he came back in January, to meet with the youngsters individually and as a group.

The bishop also stayed for dinner, and apparently enjoyed it.

Afterward, Lydon recalled, "he said, 'The best thing I can say is, look how clean my plate is.'" Upcoming events at Auberle include a "Festival of Fun" in July, meant to provide youngsters ages 7 to 13 with a chance to develop and foster self-esteem.