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Cooking up opportunity

BY MANDY M. GOODNIGHT • MGOODNIGHT@THETOWNTALK.COM • AUGUST 25, 2008

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Move over Top Chef, and put away your knives Iron Chefs – Pineville High School students are moving into the kitchen.



Pineville High School seniors David Campbell (left) and Will Yeager both are taking the culinary and restaurant management arts program at the school. Yeager is considering whether to pursue a career as a chef.

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The school just recently began the first ProStart culinary arts and restaurant management program in Central Louisiana.

"I love the Food Channel," said David Campbell, 17. "I am completely interested in the culinary arts program. I am ready to get into the kitchen."

The students have not gone into the kitchen yet, but they are going to soon.

Thanks to a \$5,000 donation from the Central Louisiana Chapter of the Louisiana Restaurant Association, the high school kitchen has been restocked, chef uniforms bought, and students each have received a knife set.

ProStart is a national program aimed at increasing student awareness of careers in the restaurant and food service industry. The two-year program ends with students earning certification.

"I want to show the students there is more to the industry than just being a chef," said Amy Thomas, Pineville's program instructor. "There are many opportunities and careers in this industry."

Students are interested in the program, as Thomas had to turn some away and plans to have an application process for entry next year.

David is interested in cooking, but not as a career.

He likes the idea of taking part in the ProStart culinary competition in New Orleans in the spring. The competition features students cooking complete meals in an hour.

"I am seriously interested in the competition and winning," he said.

Will Yeager is looking at a possible culinary arts career.

He is undecided but said getting into Pineville's program is a great opportunity to see if this is the career he wants to pursue.

Both said they were at a disadvantage, as they are seniors and will not get to complete the two-year certification process.

"It is a great opportunity for students coming up," Will said.

Juniors Ceason Jeansonne and Stephanie Marchand, both 16, will get to earn the ProStart certification.

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Season said culinary arts is one of the many career paths she is considering and likes that she gets to test the water before finishing high school.

"I am trying to boil water without burning it," Stephanie said.

She said she likes the opportunity to develop cooking skills and to work with locals in the community.

Thomas is bringing in industry managers as well as chefs to work with the students.

"This is the first year for the program, so we are all learning together," Thomas said. "This program is just wonderful for the high school and its students."

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