

EMCC culinary students make fancy meals at affordable prices

by **Cynthia Benin** - Sept. 9, 2008 09:13 AM
The Arizona Republic

Thursday, it's a choice of marinated carrot salad or duck and smoked Andouille sausage gumbo, then seared chicken steaks or pan-fried fresh water snapper. For dessert, chocolate souffle.

Friday, it's corn chowder or Caesar salad, followed by beef tenderloin or sun-dried tomato quiche. Finish it off with strawberry flambe with green peppercorns served over vanilla ice cream.

But the best thing you'll read on the menu at Regions Restaurant is the price: \$8.95 for the entire three-course meal.

Last week, the student-run restaurant at Estrella Mountain Community College opened for the 2008-09 season. Serving lunch Thursdays and Fridays, Regions is staffed by advanced-level students in the Avondale school's Culinary Studies program, who are required to work in the restaurant to earn lab credit toward their degree.

The kitchen is supervised by Jon Hill, a professor of culinary studies at EMCC,

former executive chef at the Wigwam Resort and former White House executive chef for President Reagan. Hill leads classes of around 12 students as they stir, steam and saute their way to gastronomic achievement.

"Even though they're cooking for actual guests, it's still a class," Hill said of his students' experience. "I tell them, if something is undercooked, it's like a math equation: they just didn't get the numbers quite right."

But the students get the numbers right more often than not.

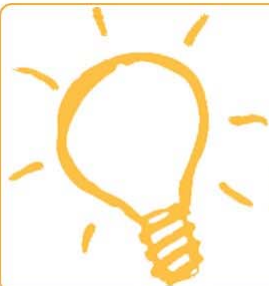
Weiru Chang and Jeff Miller, professors in the math and science department at EMCC, frequent the restaurant as often as they can.

"The food is always really good," said Chang, who has seen everyone from visiting high-school students to staff to outside community members at the restaurant.

"A three-course meal for \$8 or \$9 is a really good deal, and it's a nice break from the norm," added Miller, who normally packs a lunch from home. "Plus, we like to support the program. This is a great chance for these students to practice what they're going to be doing."

In its sixth year, Regions has experienced a surge in popularity of late, said Steve

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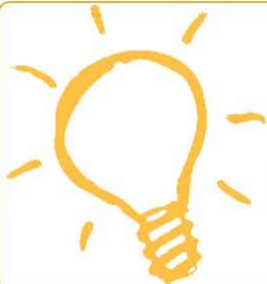


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Griffiths, program director of culinary studies. The program has expanded to offer a baking and pastry certificate that can be completed in two or three semesters. Students will begin making the desserts for the lunches at Regions within the next few weeks, once they've learned the fundamentals, Griffiths said.

For now, lunches on Thursdays are prepared by Hill's "American Regional Cuisine" class and on Friday's by his "Gourmet Foods" class. Menus are themed accordingly, with everything from Mexican-inspired Southwestern to New England seafood dishes planned for Thursdays and fancy options on Fridays, including the Wigwam's famous tortilla soup.

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