

# Estrella Mountain Community College Students Serve Up Gourmet Meals On-the-Cheap



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Unless you are some sort of incredible food critic with a reputation, the stakes are relatively low in the kitchen when you eat out. At Estrella Mountain Community College's Regions restaurant, the stakes are high no matter who sits down to eat. The kitchen is composed of culinary students prepping, cooking and setting up an entire room to feed happy customers and impress their instructors.



Estrella Mountain Community College  
EMCC culinary students

Regions is open to the public during the spring and fall semesters. The menu changes at each service and the students who operate the back of the house are assigned different tasks depending on their classes. This fall Regions is open only Wednesdays and Fridays, making it one of the most exclusive places to eat in town.

The student chefs at Regions prepare a three-course meal with soup or salad, an entrée and a dessert, all for \$10. The price is not only affordable but also helpful. One hundred percent of the restaurant's revenue is invested back into the program. So not only do students learn how to prep, cook, work a line and interact with customers with the lunch service, but it gives helps the school offset the cost of the program.

"We cater to general public and we have a great clientele here that support us day in and day out. For a \$10 lunch you can't beat it," Steve Griffiths, faculty member and program director, says.

Griffiths says that by the fall of next year, the students will be running the front of the house and

...serving customers as well, making the entire restaurant student-run. The restaurant is part of the classroom for the EMCC students, where they get hands on experience and work directly with their classmates. Griffiths describes the classroom as being a bit like a hotel kitchen, except all the departments are classes that all work together and contribute to the meal.

The tables are set and arranged perfectly, the food is fresh and handmade and the atmosphere is really unique. Regions feels like a special place where those in the know go to eat and socialize. Everyone is friendly, cheerful and elated to be eating something tasty.

The food they present is always top-notch and has accumulated a following with certain locals. Regions opened in the 2002-2003 school year and has loyal fans that have been visiting since it opened. Business picks up in the fall and winter and reservations become even harder to come by.

“We want to make them a jack of all trades, a master of nothing,” Griffiths says about the students.

Students are given a prep day in order to have everything up and running at Regions. They are graded on their sanitation practices, classical techniques, taste and texture of food and professionalism. They are divided into groups such as hot food, cold food and set up. Everyone has their responsibility and because of that, service flows expertly well.

Griffiths says everything from the soups and stocks to the bread are made from scratch. The desserts are made and prepped by the baking classes, rounding out the meal. On September 6 Regions served a delicious buffet style lunch with shrimp bisque, chilled cantaloupe soup, Mediterranean salad, fresh fruit, eggplant parmesan, green beans with walnuts, rosemary bread, two types of cupcakes and angel food cake. Customers had their fill and then some, sampling as many of their dishes as possible.

Griffiths says the students in the culinary program come from all walks of life and include high school students, stay at home moms and military personnel. They are exposed to every aspect of a culinary career so that when they leave EMCC, they will have a better idea of what they want to pursue.

“It’s not just about cooking food, it’s about running an overall kitchen so that you are profitable,” Griffiths says.

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