

LOCAL NEWS

Cooking up some fun Vacaville High School

Vacaville High students enjoy culinary arts classes



Joey Olson and Issac Delarosby mix cookie batter in Culinary I class at Vacaville High School while Tyler Chalk washes dishes in the background.



By **NICK MCCONNELL** | nmcconnell@timesheraldonline.com |
October 5, 2023 at 4:14 p.m.

It's always a sweet feeling to finish an assignment, but it's particularly sweet when the assignment is a batch of cookies.

And for Culinary II students at Vacaville High School, that was the case on Wednesday as they learned to make spritz cookies with different colors and sprinkles.

Ava Ascher said students in her Culinary II class are currently working through the coffee unit, learning to make white chocolate mochas, cold brew, lattes and cappuccinos on espresso machines. Students have been particularly interested in making pumpkin spiced chai lattes.

"What I like about the coffee unit is that it's teaching them barista skills," Ascher said, "So I had a couple students say 'I'm going to go apply at Starbucks.'"

The ability to learn real world skills that students can take into the workforce or into their personal lives is what career and technical education is all about, Ascher said, and she hopes students leave her classes with basic cooking skills like dishwashing, knife skills and cost analysis. One of her favorite units focuses on working with yeast, she said, as students learn that it is a living organism and have fun watching dough rise.

Students have to exemplify teamwork in the class as well, she said, which is especially important in an era when screens are making learning less hands on and face to face than ever before. Following the pandemic, she said, Ascher hears from students that they want more opportunities to work with their hands and learn by doing.

"We can watch as many Tik Tok videos and Instagram videos, but at the end of the day they just want to do it," she said.

On Wednesday, students were making spritz cookies, using a cookie press and experimenting with different colors and sprinkles. Students also had to calculate the cost of each cookie based on the amount of materials used. Projects like this one help students showcase their personalities while learning basic cooking skills.

Ascher teaches four sections of Culinary I with 40 students per class, and one section of Culinary II with 24 students. The classroom is equipped with six ranges and work stations, as well as refrigeration, storage, pots and pans and other equipment. Students are assigned roles each day in class to simulate roles in a restaurant, and rotate those roles throughout the class.

Ascher has been teaching the class for four years, and has had a few students ask her for letters of recommendation for professional opportunities in the field. While not every student will pursue work in the culinary arts after graduation, she said, each student in the class will have learned valuable lessons about the basics of cooking that they can carry forward for the rest of their lives.

"I just think hands on learning is the best learning they can do," Ascher said.

Student Joey Olson said he took Culinary I last year and took Culinary II to further expand his horizons and explore the field.

"I wanted to get Culinary I last year, and I liked taking it first period so I could get food in the mornings," he said, "but it kind of just took off and it's been a fun class to do and super interesting."

Olson said he has always cooked at home, and likes to make BLT sandwiches. He's not sure if he wants to pursue a career working with food, but he's happy to be able to explore it.

"It's good to keep my options open," he said.

id decided to take it with some friends.

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