

First course

Bishop Kelley students learn about food – from prep to serving



MICHAEL WYKE/Tulsa World

Bishop Kelley freshmen Payton Fesperman (left), Sam King and Matt Maguire learn the finer points of peeling asparagus from Spoons Across America program manager Shelley Menaged in the Polo Grill kitchen.

By NATALIE MIKLES
World Scene Writer

April was a sweet month for 20 Bishop Kelley freshmen. They learned to use an immersion blender. "Sweet." They conquered proper napkin folding. "Sweet." And they served a four-course gourmet dinner to their parents without spilling anything on anyone's lap. "Totally sweet."

The Polo Grill in Utica Square was the site for this monthlong training in etiquette, event planning, nutrition, meal preparation and service, which was all part of the Spoons Across America program, a nonprofit organization based in New York that develops food-based educational programs for children.

For these teens, the assignment was to produce a dinner party — everything from making the invitations, arranging the flowers, polishing the silver and, for their final test, making dinner for their parents.

Using the Polo Grill kitchen, the students conceptualized and then created a menu of tomato bisque soup, a lettuce wedge with blue cheese, pecan-crusted chicken, jalapeno cheese stone-ground grits, springtime asparagus and three-berry bread pudding.

Susan Fesperman, whose son, Payton, was part of the program, assisted her longtime friends, Robert and Ouida Merrifield, chefs and proprietors of the Polo Grill, in bringing Spoons Across America to the Polo Grill.

"It's like covering two months of information in a few hours," Ouida said.



JAMES GIBBARD/Tulsa World

Freshman Danna Barrick, 15, serves a salad to Laura McCoy during the students' dinner at the Polo Grill.

The students were divided into groups, where they were able to take part in every aspect of the party preparations. Some of the teens' talents and weaknesses showed right away.

In their first day in the kitchen, the teens began preparation for the dinner by making the soup and cleaning the asparagus, with the help of Chef Michael Funk.

When Funk asked the kids to hand him a ladle, one answered, "What's that?" Apparently, some had more kitchen experience than others.

Matt Maguire was doing fine in the kitchen, but it was at the silver polishing and napkin folding station that he really shined. He folded napkin after napkin,

until he ran out, perfecting the envelope-style folding technique. "Oh baby — oh, check that out. Oh, that was sweet," he said.

The humor wasn't lost on Maguire's friends, but they sure weren't laughing at him. That's hard to do when you and all your friends are walking around in towering white chef's hats.

"We encourage the kids to find what they like to do and to do it creatively," said Shelley Menaged with Spoons Across America.

During the last session, just hours before the final dinner, the teens got some last-minute tips from the Polo Grill wait-staff. Always say sir and ma'am — serve drinks from the right



Freshmen Anna Connor (left), Laura Slagle, Sam King and Katie Kirkpatrick learn to use an immersion blender while making tomato soup.



Freshmen Matt Maguire (left), Laura Slagle, Anna Connor and Katie Kirkpatrick taste their tomato soup.

Photos by MICHAEL WYKE/Tulsa World

and food from the left. As the parents began to arrive, some kids gave discreet head nods to their moms and dads. Others stole a quick hug before heading back into the heat of the kitchen.

After the parents were seated, Robert Merrifield told the parents what a good job the kids had done, although he offered a warning.

"If there's a problem tonight with the service or food, you can ground the kids later," he said.

Bishop Kelley students taking part in the Spoons Across America program were Greg Aran, Danna Barrick, Anna Connor, Mary Dill, Payton Fesperman, Houston Fields, Alex Foley, Katherine Gass, Will Heckenkemper, Kaitlin Heinrichs, Sam King, Katie Kirkpatrick, Matt Maguire, John McCoy, Elizabeth Morgan, Michael Nuding, Mary Beth Pearson, Aaron Petrikin, Diane Scheurman and Laura Slagle.

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market basket

DARYL WILSON/
Tulsa World



At Conrad Farms in Bixby, customers are both thrilled and disappointed when they see the **strawberries**.

"There's just not enough to sell by the flats," Vernon Conrad said. But the strawberries he does have are sweet and flavorful, and are being snatched up just as quickly as they're picked.

You can also find limited amounts of strawberries at the area farmers' markets. New at the Cherry Street Farmers' Market will be **broccoli rabe, rhubarb**, new varieties of **lettuce, beets, snow peas, broccoli, cauliflower and micro-greens**.

Look for **asparagus, spinach, green onions** and lettuces at all of the farmers' markets.

Conrad is looking forward to **broccoli** by the weekend, **bulb onions** in a week or two and, still a few weeks off, **sweet peas**.

— Natalie Mikles

Strawberries in Red Wine

2 cups fruity red wine, such as Santa Maddalena, Barbera, Valpolicella, Merlot or Zinfandel
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
About 1/2 cup sugar
1 pound strawberries (2 pints), trimmed, and halved if large

1. Stir together wine, lemon juice and sugar (to taste) in a bowl. Stir in strawberries and let macerate at room temperature for 1 hour, then chill until cold, up to 1 hour but no longer. Fruit will become too soft if it steeps for more than 2 hours.
2. Serve berries in small bowls with some of their juices.

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