

Really cooking

Graduates of OCC's Culinary Arts Program get to work

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It was a different Stacy Lys who reported for work at the Fox & Hounds Inn this week. Colleagues at the upscale Bloomfield Hills restaurant might have noticed something different — a new *savoir-faire*, or perhaps a little swagger in her walk.

Tuesday marked the first full week of Stacy Lys as a graduate of the Culinary Apprenticeship Program at Oakland Community College. The Lake Orion resident was one of nine students to complete the culinary portion of the three-year program last week.

Lys and other apprentices may still have to complete a couple of general education courses in order to be certified and to receive an associate's degree. But the big part of the program is now behind them, and they are considered graduates.

Lys, 30, admitted feeling a lit-

tle more sophisticated, when she reported for work. "It shouldn't make any difference," she said. "I've worked here for seven years, and I've always had good training."

"But I probably swaggered a little," she said. "I've worked here for seven years, and I've always had good training."

OCC commemorated the most recent group of graduates with a tradition — the graduation dinner June 20 at the Orchard Lake Campus in Farmington Hills. The dinner traditionally features the best cuisine the new chefs can put forth for friends, relatives and school officials.

The dinner — with blackened halibut, pineapple-mango salsa, New Zealand lamb chops and Barenjager sorbet — was

painstakingly prepared as the students' last act as culinary apprentices.

"Now, I expect more of Stacy," said Terrance Schuster, Lys' boss at the Fox & Hounds and her supervising chef at OCC. "And I'm working her harder."

Schuster is executive chef at the Fox & Hounds — and part of OCC's culinary arts program — for 15 years. He's currently the supervising chef for another member of his cooking staff, Eric Pierce, who is a first-year student at OCC.

Lys is a sous, or assistant, chef. She's a pay grade above certified cook, and she handles some management chores. "Stacy's worked hard," said Schuster, "and she's been successful. But the hardest part may be ahead of her. Last week, she was a coworker. Now she is a boss."

Lys said she welcomes the additional responsibility. The experience will be helpful if she is to fulfill a personal goal of one day owning her own catering business.

The apprenticeship program requires one full day at the Orchard Ridge Campus and full-time employment at a full service restaurant. Students make a living and get on-the-job training from professional chefs, who also grade their performance.

"That's one of the advantages of this program," said Janice Simmons of Rochester Hills, one of several OCC trustees to attend the dinner-graduation. "Students get enough practical experience they are ready to step right into a good job."

Graduate Robert Levine, for example, was ready to report to Beaumont Hospital. "I think hospital food can be a lot more palatable," said the 1988 graduate of Southfield-Lathrup High School. He hopes to continue his education and eventually earn certification as a hospital dietitian.

One person who knows the program thoroughly is Michael W. Connery, an OCC graduate apprentice in 1988. He was executive chef at the Bloomfield Hills Country Club before becoming part owner of The Hill Seafood and Chop House in Grosse Pointe Farms. Connery was also the supervising chef for apprentice Anthony Mamis of Toledo, Ohio. "We received very good training in the classroom," said Mamis. "And we get work experience on the job. After tonight, I'll be full time at The Hill."

While graduating apprentices prepared the dinner, food and beverages were served by underclassmen, including Woodie Thomas, who works at the Farmington Hills Country Club. "This (serving) is fun," said Thomas, a second-year apprentice. "But I'm looking forward to



Fired up about work: In the photo above, Stacy Lys uses fire to prepare a dish at the Fox & Hounds Inn in Bloomfield Hills. Below, Anthony Mamis (left) prepares New Zealand lamb chops for the traditional graduation dinner at OCC-Orchard Ridge.

next year, when I'll be one of the chefs."

Darlene M. Levinson, who teaches business and management courses in the culinary program, said salary levels depend on proficiency and experience. But executive chefs can earn up to \$100,000 per year, she said, while sous chefs are generally paid between \$30,000 to \$40,000.

Having a youngster in the culinary arts has advantages, according to Carolyn and Daniel Hall of Genesee County. Their son Daniel was a graduating apprentice who worked at the Palace Grille in Auburn Hills. "It's great to have him cook dinner," said his dad.

But there are also drawbacks, according to his mother.

"Dan used to give me a kiss after I cooked dinner," she said, "and tell me everything was swell. He still gives me a kiss, but now he's likely to say something like, 'Mom, don't you think you could have cooked the main course a little differently?'"



Soup's on: Robert Levine, a recent graduate of Oakland Community College's Culinary Arts Program, samples the soup.

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