

Culinary showcase

By Bonnie Obremski, North Adams Transcript

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NORTH ADAMS -- Forty-six of the region's most promising young chefs toiled for nearly a month pre-paring for a Friday evening meal at McCann Technical School.

The French-themed feast celebrated the 25th year of a tradition designed to showcase the talents of students in the school's Culinary Department.

"Since it was the 25th Anniversary Gourmet Dinner, we wanted to make it fancier than usual," Patrick Cariddi, the department's head, said amid the cafeteria bustle on Friday afternoon.

Luckily, he said, his high school students were more talented than usual.

As evidence, he unlocked one of the kitchen's walk-in freezers and revealed the collection of ice sculptures. They included two smooching doves, a basket that would be filled with fresh cut flowers, and a 3-foot ocean liner that would hold shrimp cocktail as its cargo.

But, the sculptures were only secondary to the preparation of a complicated entree -- Beef Wellington in a red wine sauce. Beef Wellington is a piece of beef tenderloin coated in pate and a mushroom paste, which is then wrapped in puff pastry and baked.

According to the menu, written in French, a potato dish, bread and Caesar salad would accompany the main dish. For dessert, the students had prepared tray upon tray of miniature pastries.

There were appetizers, too, and perhaps surprisingly, at least two of the students identified the fruit and vegetable platters as the dishes that were most difficult (and fun) to make.

"Every one has to look exactly the same, and no two colors can go next to one another," Laura Pratt, a 16-year-old junior student from Adams, said. Brandon Hoag, a 16-year-old junior from Cheshire said he enjoyed assembling the colors and shapes on the platters. He planned on serving his parents and grandparents during the event.

Cariddi said the dinner is open to the public, but all 150 tickets sold in about 48 hours, mostly to the family and friends of students. Each ticket cost \$24 and the proceeds will fund scholarships and field trips for students studying in the department. In addition to Cariddi, the department's instructors include Kim Kaigle, Melissa King and Ann Zaleski.

Lindsay Pilling, a 15-year-old sophomore from North Adams, said she enjoyed seeing the cooking skills of her schoolmates. She loved the excitement of preparing the meal, during which she would serve her mother and her mother's friends.

Pratt said she looked forward to opening one or two of her own bakeries after graduating from Mc-Cann. She would sell chocolates and perhaps a few of her specialties, including angel food cake and white chocolate chip macadamia nut cookies.

"I baked a lot with my gram and my parents," she said. "I've just always loved it."

