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Wisconsin storefront tutors chefs in French technique

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ELM GROVE, Wis. If you're looking for a recipe for cheesy broccoli bake, don't enroll at L'Ecole de Cuisine. While classes on novelty recipes form the core of many cooking school schedules, L'Ecole de Cuisine aims to teach the classic French techniques that form the basis of fine cooking.

The bright, inviting storefront classroom in a suburban shopping center west of Milwaukee is the realization of **Jill Prescott's** dream. The former cardiac technician was lured to cuisine 13 years ago after attending a French cooking class by former Cordon Bleu representative Richard Grausman at Carson Pirie Scott. "He opened up food for me," Prescott said. "He made a real buttercream with egg yolks and sugar syrup. It was wonderful."

Prescott subsequently worked with Grausman, testing recipes for his cookbook.

Prescott has a diploma from La Varenne and has studied at L'Ecole de Gastronomie Francaise Ritz-Escoffier in Paris and with Giuliano Bugialli in Florence. School director Barbara Graham holds a degree from the Cordon Bleu in Paris.

After a \$20,000 investment in the gleaming white

classroom-kitchen, Prescott is now investing 12-hour days to get her venture off the ground. "I'm pretty much out of control," Prescott said, laughing.

Since the school opened in February, L'Ecole de Cuisine has drawn students from the Chicago area and all over Wisconsin and has hosted some culinary heavyweights, including Jacques Pepin and Guy Legay, the chef at the Ritz Hotel in Paris. Legay, not knowing what to expect from a cooking school in the American "provinces," was impressed.

Graham thinks it was the green beans that won him over.

A local supplier who happened to be in New York at the time hand-carried the haricots verts (baby green beans) that Legay had specified for his class. As a practical joke, Graham hid the haricots verts and presented some fatigued supermarket green beans in their place. "He looked at them and said, 'It's OK, we'll make do.' He was great," Graham said.

Bringing top chefs into the school is a priority. One of Milwaukee's finest, Sanford D'Amato, who is about to open his own restaurant, Sanford, does regular turns as chef instructor-on-call.

The basic, intermediate, advanced and diploma courses (six to eight sessions each), taught by Prescott, Graham and D'Amato, are modeled after Parisian cooking schools, stressing an understanding of classic techniques required to master more complicated procedures.

Six students are accepted in these participation classes, and the staff-to-student ratio is impressive: two teachers and two assistants for six students. "They get a lot of attention," Prescott said.

Demonstration classes, which can accept as many as 48 students, feature a variety of topics, including

French ragouts, potatoes, pates and terrines, strudel, turkey and goose. Two instructors and one or two assistants is the norm for these sessions.

"If I'm doing a sauce reduction, Barb can do something else. There's no gap," Prescott said.

Staffer Kris Montgomery enjoys working in such an enthusiastic environment. "Both Jill and Barb are super teachers, interested in seeing that everybody learns," Montgomery said.

Graham is confident students will learn through sensory experience. For example, when they taste stocks made in class they will realize why they are superior to commercial stock bases.

"For some (of the professionals), it'll never be

cost-effective, but at least they'll know the difference," Graham said.

"If this works, I'll be the happiest person in the world. If it doesn't and I have to get a structured job, I'll be in big trouble."

For information, write L'Ecole de Cuisine, 890 Elm Grove Rd., Suite 106B, Elm Grove, Wis. 53122, or call 1-414-782-4044.

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