

Getting ‘good eats’

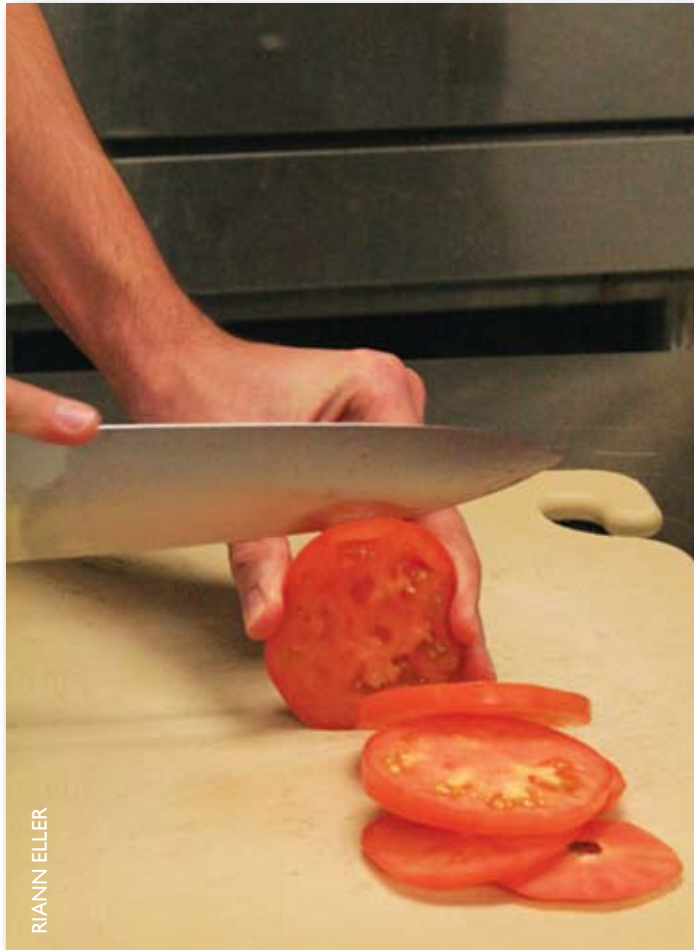
OSU helps restaurateurs get a jump start in the restaurant business

The sound of sizzling bacon fills the air, the aroma of coffee slowly seeps into the room, and the doorbell jingles as hungry customers filter in the door just in time for breakfast.

Linda Grimes of Edmond, Okla., has carried this vivid dream with her for years. Thanks in part to Oklahoma State University, her dream soon could be a reality.

Grimes owns and operates a small, portable concession business called Kelli’s Kurlies & More and is considering permanently parking it to open a restaurant. Grimes wanted to know her chances for success before she embarked on such an expensive journey, so she turned to OSU for guidance.

Chris Cuellar from the OSU Department of Hotel and Restaurant Administration helps prepare a meal for the lunch crowd at The Ranchers Club.



The Robert M. Kerr Food & Agricultural Products Center has partnered with the OSU Department of Hotel and Restaurant Administration, the Oklahoma Restaurant Association, the Tulsa City-County Health Department and the Oklahoma State Department of Health to create the Restaurateur Basic Training program. This educational experience may make the decision to invest in the restaurant business easier for people like Grimes, said Andrea Graves, FAPC business planning and marketing specialist.

“I wanted to know if I had a snowball’s chance of succeeding, and the training gave reliable resources to help us make an informed decision,” Grimes said.

Many people do not understand or simply are not prepared for what they are about to encounter by going into the restaurant business, Graves said. Now, they can sign up for the training program through the Oklahoma Restaurant Association Web site and get a better understanding of what it takes to succeed.

“We use the training to prepare people for what they are about to get into,” Graves said. “It can be overwhelming with all the permits that must be obtained and rules and regulations that must be followed. The odds to succeed in the restaurant business are already low; we want to increase those odds.”

The \$199, one-day training course provides information about business planning, marketing and branding, permits, design and regulations. Grimes said she needed help on how to make the transition from a concession business to a restaurant. Before taking the plunge, she wanted to know the basics of how much things were going to cost, she said.

“If we don’t have a good day, we can’t just pack up and go home like we can now,” Grimes said. “We would be stuck. We really wanted to know how much financial help we would need, how to hire employees and the entire inspection process.”

The program was organized when health department inspectors saw a need for education and assistance. The course is offered quarterly and includes everything new business owners would want or need to know, but the course is not limited to aspiring restaurant owners, said Rebecca Eastham, HRAD clinical instructor and general manager of the Atherton Hotel.

“We wanted this class to be a one-stop shop for potential restaurateurs,” Eastham said. “We want to become a central source of information, and we want it to be a refresher course for those already in the industry.”

Graves said the training currently is limited to about

25 participants per session, and to help the sessions remain convenient for all Oklahomans, the training location is rotated between Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

“We don’t plan on the sessions getting any bigger than about 25 participants each quarter because we want to maintain a comfortable environment,” Graves said.

Eastham said the seminar’s speakers are professionals who have been in industry for years.

“Presenters are professors here at the college, from the health department or sometimes even professors who are teaching and have managed a restaurant,” Eastham said. “They all donate their time to keep it cost effective. We only charge participants enough to cover materials and their lunch for the day.”

In the end, the Restaurateur Basic Training program is an investment in Oklahoma. According to the Oklahoma Restaurant Association, restaurants brought \$536.9 bil-

lion into the U.S. economy in 2007, and that number is projected to increase. Restaurants also employ 12.8 million people in the U.S., and by 2017, that number is projected to be 14 million.

Those statistics matter little to Linda Grimes; she is just trying to fulfill a dream.

“When my husband and I got married, we wanted to open a restaurant,” Grimes said. “Then, we started a family and put that dream on hold. Now, I just want a place to cook good old-fashioned meals and maybe a little Weight Watchers, too.” • *By Riann Eller, Depew, Okla.*

For more information about the Restaurateur Basic Training, please visit the Oklahoma Restaurant Association Web site at <http://okrestaurants.com>.

2009 Restaurateur Basic Training

Tulsa Sessions

James O. Goodwin Health Center
5051 South 129th East Avenue
Jan. 27 • Aug. 25

Oklahoma City Sessions

Hospitality Comp
3800 Northwest 36th Street
April 28 • Oct. 27

Training from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. • Visit <http://okrestaurants.com> or call 800-375-8181 for more information

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