Keiser University culinary arts training facility served acclaim in Lakewood Ranch

By KATHRYN MOSCHELLA

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LAKEWOOD RANCH -- Keiser University culinary arts student, Renee Paul, spent 25 years in corporate America holding executive positions, which resulted in regularly commutes to Europe.

A single mother, Paul switched gears when her son reached the age of independence, went back to school and is now captain of Keiser's Lakewood Ranch campus culinary arts student competition team.

"After I had corporate burnout, everyone kept asking me why not own a restaurant since you're such a good cook? I'm really enjoying the experience of working with all these chefs and I hope to get an (internship) at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas where my family now lives," Paul said.

Paul was one of several culinary students who assisted in a ribbon-cutting and dedication Friday for the student training kitchen, designated a "Chaine des Rotisseurs Regional Chef Training Facility" by the prestigious international gastronomic society founded in Paris in 1248.
The Lakewood Ranch/Sarasota campus is the first regional young chef training facility in the United States inducted into the society, whose mission is to promote excellence in the hospitality arts.

"What I like about the society is they're advocates of young chefs and we encourage that behavior. One of the things they do around the world and in the United States is host competitions for the best chef every year. They give out scholarships to the students as well," said Joseph Hardiman, associate vice chancellor for culinary arts.

Keiser's culinary arts program is accredited by the American Culinary Federation. Students graduate with an associate's degree after completing courses in food preparation and handling up to more advanced levels of cooking. The curriculum also includes an internship, which prepares students for professional positions in the food service industry.

The ceremony was topped by a five-course continental meal with wine pairings prepared by Keiser culinary arts students and served by hospitality management students and instructors.

"One of the things that gets the students excited is the menu. Seeing the high-end food, it gets their blood going. They're really passionate about food and this is a prize piece for them," said culinary arts Dean Michael Moench.

The gourmet menu included vichyssoise, a cold, creamy potato-leek soup, and Coquilles St. Jacques, a classic French dish of scallops in a creamy sauce under a crust of bread crumbs and cheese.

Moench said some of his graduates have risen in the ranks professionally to sous chefs at internationally acclaimed restaurants such Berns Steak House in Tampa, known for the largest wine collection in the world, and a famous dessert room.

Following the ceremony, which featured the society tradition of sabering a bottle of champagne, students from the culinary arts team, two chef instructors, campus President Todd Cunningham and Arthur Keiser, founder of the private, not-for-profit university that serves nearly 20,000 students, received special honors from the society as well as scholarships for students.

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