



▲ Liz Kozlowski (center) and Bonnie Kraus (right) are entertained by chef Mark Kwasiagroch during an Oakton Community College adult education cooking class last week at the Skokie bakery Delec To Go. **Page 23**

Photo by Jason Han ● Staff Photographer



From left, Ilene Thomas of Evanston, Bonnie Kraus of Chicago and Liz Kozlowski of Des Plaines receive key baking tips last week from Delec To Go chef Mark Kwasiogroch. Oakton Community College's new adult education course provides amateur chefs an opportunity to learn from the pros inside their own kitchens. — Jason Han/Staff Photographer

Tasty teaching

OCC cooks up adult education class with chefs

By **MIKE ISAACS** | Staff Writer
 misaacs@pioneerlocal.com

The kitchen of the Skokie bakery Delec To Go has no blackboard or textbooks or student desks and chairs.

But on a regular basis, the small kitchen from which so many tantalizing desserts emerge becomes a classroom for adult cooking students eager to get their hands dirty — usually with cake mix and butter and sugar and other savory ingredients.

Oakton Community College's continuing education program for the first time is offering a special series of classes called *Cooking With the Chefs*. Delec to Go and David's Bistro in Des Plaines have provided rare and irresistible opportunities for amateur chefs to get first-hand tips from culinary experts inside their own kitchens.

"This is just a whole lot of fun," says Ilene Thomas of Evanston, as she waits for the night's class at the Skokie bakery to begin.

She and other students will learn all about cake mixes, and as usual, there will be plenty of hands-on baking and edible results to take home.

"This is really a lot of fun for me, too," says Delec To Go chef Mark Kwasiogroch. "Getting dirty cooking with the students, watching them get excited over the things they're learning is pretty rewarding. They ask great questions and are usually a step ahead of me."

Kwasiogroch, who opened Delec To Go less than a year ago with partner Veronica Miramontes, is a long-time teacher at Chicago's Kendall College and has been a chef for about 30 years.

"What's special," he says, "is that you can see the improvement so quickly. From one class to the next, they really get what we're doing."

Original idea

The idea for *Cooking With the Chefs* came from OCC's Alliance for Lifelong Learning program director Linda Mock-

enhaupt.

"With foodtv.com and all of the cooking shows on TV now, there's a lot more 'foodies' than ever before," Mockenhaupt said. "My job is to try to tap into what's popular. Sometimes, it's a roll of the dice, but I thought this would work well."

About 50 or so students have signed up for the series of classes at the two eateries, although attendance varies between them (David's Bistro has more students) and from class to class. Delec To Go can only accommodate up to 10 students in its cozy kitchen, but tonight's class is lighter than usual with three adults ready for some serious baking.

"I was starting to get into baking and I felt I needed additional help," says Thomas. "The classes are just excellent here."

Also on hand are sisters Bonnie Kraus of Chicago and Liz Kozlowski of Des Plaines. These siblings have created their own sweet tables and have made cakes and other

pastries for relatives. They want to get even better.

"This has been really informative," says Kozlowski about the class. "And I think we're starting to loosen up (the chef) a bit," she says, smiling.

But Kwasiogroch doesn't need much loosening up. He has a playful and winning way with his adult students, serving up loads of useful information with good-natured needling along the way. Everyone seems to be in delicious spirits.

The chef first demonstrates using a mix to make fruit-filling vanilla bars. After he sticks his delicacy in the oven, the students take their turn. They all move along smoothly, filling their concoctions with combinations of apricot, raspberry and blueberry.

It doesn't matter how advanced in the culinary ways his students are, the chef says. In fact, one of his students' daughters attended an earlier class.

"She had no experience but
 See **TASTY**, page 26

TASTY

Continued from page 23

she learned a lot," says Kozlowski. "Everyone is welcome here."

The classmates scrupulously take notes on recipe sheets they receive at the start of the class so they will have them in their own kitchens. By the end of two hours, they have learned new tips for vanilla bars, coffee cakes, muffins and cookies.

As they prepare their various dishes, Miramontes swiftly pulls away dirty and used dishes and replaces them with bowls of new ingredients. This way, they're able to complete a lot of baking in short time.

"Too bad we don't get that kind of service at home," says one student as a messy bowl is cleared out. "I'd love to use a dish or pan in my kitchen and then have someone whisk it away."

Near the end of the class, the chef pulls out steaming muffins that have been baking for the last 30 minutes. "Look at those beautiful muffins," he says with a grin. "God I'm a genius."

Hooked in

In a short time, the students are sampling

their sweet treats and will have plenty to take home.

Previous classes at Delec To Go included breads, cakes around the world and eclairs and scones. The last class in November will teach students about decorating cakes.

Mockenhaupt said the series will be offered again in spring. In future series, she hopes to expand the number of eateries that open up their kitchens to adult students.

"A lot of people are far more aware of the restaurant business these days, and they have professional equipment in their own kitchens," she said. "I'm really anxious to see the written feedback about this series. I think people love getting tips and tricks in the kitchen they never knew about."

The immediate feedback from the three adult students at Delec To Go suggests she is right.

"We would definitely take another class like this one," says Kraus. "I really didn't picture myself taking any kind of classes. But I think we're hooked now."

To sign up for the next Cook With the Chefs series at OCC, call (847) 982-9888 and press option 3 after Nov. 14.