



*Willow Street Vo-Tech . . .*

# The Place To Learn Gourmet Cooking

by Sally Bair  
Feature Writer

The kitchens of the quantity foods class at the Lancaster County Area Vo-Tech School at Willow Street are a beehive of activity. At any given moment there may be bread rising, cakes baking, perfectly arranged chef's salads being prepared and soup bubbling on the stove.

All the work is being done by the 67 students from county schools who are preparing themselves for careers in the food industry, under the supervision of teachers Wayne Byers and Jay Eshleman.

The quantity foods class includes instruction in bakery and restaurant practices and students learn the gamut from arranging attractive platters to baking danish pastry.

Wayne Byers has responsibility for teaching the bakery



Learning to work in the food industry offers lots of opportunity for creativity. Here Mr. Eshleman helps his students as they prepare to coil up a snake made from "dummy dough".

portion of the course. Although raised in the Pennsylvania Dutch country of Lebanon County he owned a bakery in Columbia and two years ago built "Byers Pastries" in Marietta, which is now being operated by a son. The bakery tradition runs in the Byers family with two other sons owning bakeries in Elizabethtown and Hanover.

Byers said his interest in teaching stems from having owned his own bakeries. "I had a desire to teach young people because I had trained so many people in my shop."

From all the delicious-looking doughnuts, cookies and cakes to be found in the bakery department, it appears that his training is quite successful.

The course outline indicates that students leaving the class should be well prepared to delight a wide variety of tastes. Students learn to make biscuits, muffins, quick breads, yeast breads of all varieties, danish pastry, doughnuts, cookies of more types than I knew existed, cakes, icing and fillings, pies, puff pastries, petit fours and a wide variety of other mouth-watering foods. It's small wonder that the classroom smells are the most inviting anywhere.

Having half day sessions is not without its difficulties when it comes to baking. Byers says the morning class must prepare yeast doughs which are then completed by the afternoon class. A huge refrigerator and freezer helps to hold foods for further work on subsequent days.

Byers says there is no particular effort to teach the students to prepare Pennsylvania Dutch specialities, but adds, "We do prepare them to be employed locally."

Although most of the recipes used in the class are standard, Byers said students occasionally bring in their own recipes and they will be discussed and tried if possible.

What happens to the delicious things that come out of the gigantic ovens in the bakery department, and to the failures? All the students at the Vo-Tech school help to eat them! Each day different classes are allowed to purchase the goodies at a nominal price. There was no mention of the students there

suffering from unusual weight problems.

Overseeing the restaurant practice operation is Jay Eshleman, a graduate of Ephrata High School and the Culinary Institute of America at Hyde Park, N. Y., where he had two years training as a chef. He had quite a lot of on-the-job training all along the eastern coast, and he says he has worked in diners, hotels, hospitals, seafood houses and just about every kind of food service operation. For four years he was one of the chefs at Lancaster General Hospital, and this is his third year at Willow Street.

Eshleman speaks enthusiastically about the training that is offered at the Vo-Tech school. He says, "The three main areas we stress are shop safety, sanitation and developing good work habits and attitudes. Most people do not leave jobs because they can't do the work, but because they can't get along with other people. This is something we try to emphasize."

Eshleman added, "The primary goal of the course is to prepare each student for some kind of work in the food industry." This may mean he will be a chef, or he may be a pot scrubber, but the important thing is that each student will be qualified for a job which will make him an independent wage earner.

Students in the two classes do not learn just to prepare the food, but they also spend a great deal of time learning procedures and basic cooking methods and techniques as well as sound nutrition.

Eshleman points out that there are 103 basic tools and 13 major pieces of equipment used in the food industry, and students must be acquainted with all of them.

Dining room service is an integral part of the restaurant practice class, and for actual experience they operate a small restaurant for the teachers at Willow Street and occasionally serve small groups of visitors. Prices in the restaurant are set just to cover the expense of the food itself. The students prepare the food, set the tables, take orders and serve the food. There are usually eight items on the daily menu, according to Eshleman, ranging from soup and sandwiches to chef's salads and more hearty entrees.

To accomplish the daily chores associated with the restaurant, students are divided into four groups - some work on entrees, some on the soup and salads, some in the dining room and some have to do that omnipresent job - pots and pans.

When asked if it's true that the best bakers and chefs are men, Byers said, "I've trained a lot of women, and a lot of good bakers are women. But one drawback for women is that large scale baking is heavy work. There is a lot of lifting and carrying." Eshleman agreed, and said diplomatically, "Both can be good." He went on to illustrate how heavy the huge cooking pots become when filled and agreed that the large equipment and really hard physical work are two reasons there are so many men in the field.

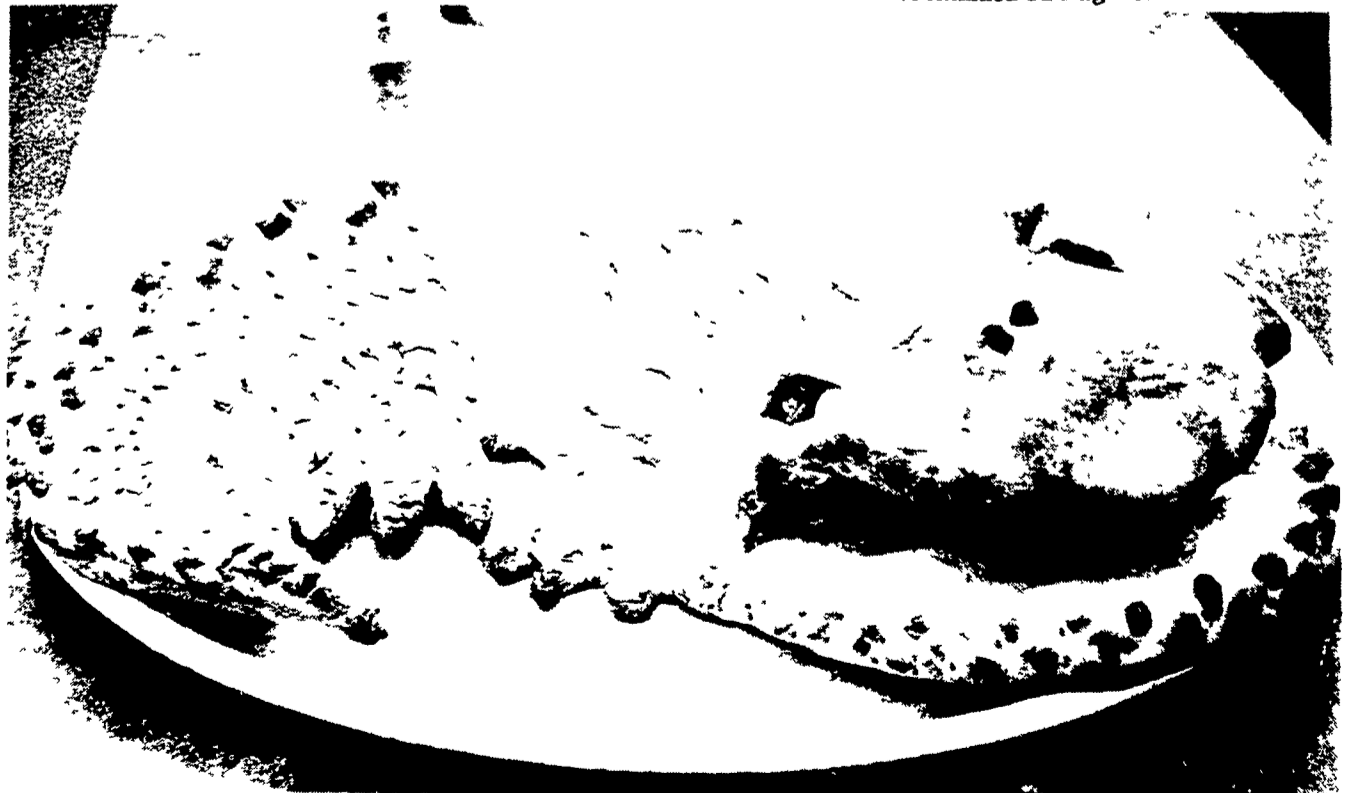


Greg Mongeau (left) McCaskey senior, and Keith Douts, Penn Manor junior, prepare baskets of bread for the tables in the restaurant. The many bread varieties are homemade.

While the huge kitchen and baking area are bustling with activity, there is yet another area which is used for food service at Willow Street - the regular cafeteria which feeds between 500 and 600 students daily.

Presiding over that domain is Mrs. Nancy Weiss, RD6, Lancaster. Here the work area is larger, but somewhat quieter with six people assisting regularly in preparing the day's menus. Mrs. Weiss has been with the Vo-Tech school since it opened, and before that worked in the Lancaster

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Students fashioned this very scaly alligator out of "dummy dough". Mr. Eshleman says there is nothing to spoil, and such creatures are interesting

centerpieces for buffet tables. This particular alligator was used as a centerpiece for open house at the school.