

# Tasting the work of future chefs

By Vinnie Buchanan

In the middle of winter, few people want to venture far from home. At the same time, the routines of day-to-day life can seem quite confining.

One way to cheer yourself up, experience something new, and even help provide good food for the future is to visit one of three area schools that train future chefs.

All three offer lunch programs (and sometimes also dinner programs) that are open to the public. It will take some planning to attend because all three work strictly from reservations — but the reward is that you will be treated to delicious and imaginative food for a fairly reasonable price. What is stressful to the students ends up being very tasty for the visitors.

## Conestoga College

Conestoga College has been training chefs through its culinary arts and management courses for more than 30 years and it has been offer-

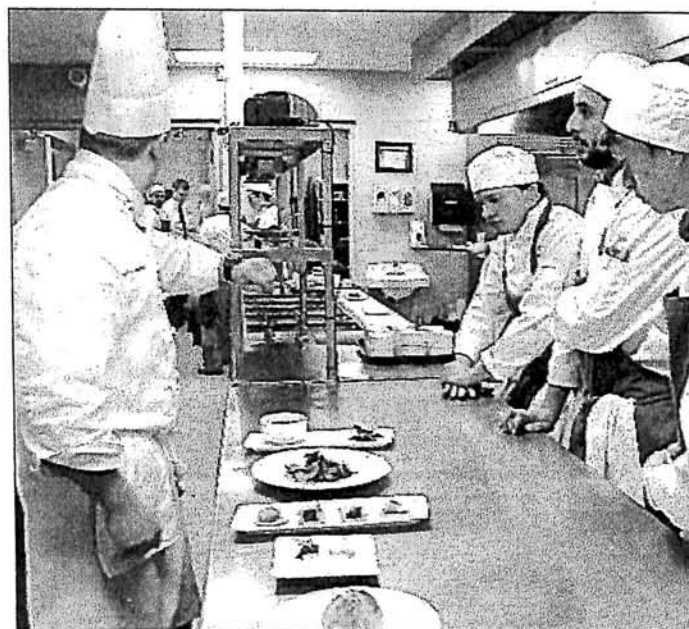
## Out for the day

ing lunches for more than 25.

An extensive makeover at the Waterloo campus, the former University Heights High School on University Avenue East near Weber Street, has resulted in teaching labs and a full teaching kitchen. And what was once the backstage area of the high school auditorium is now a restfully decorated venue with seating for about 50 diners and candles and flowers on every table.

The students work in teams that are responsible on a series of days for tasks that include everything from waiting on tables to baking bread, planning menus and creating the meals to be served.

Diners are presented with a menu of choices (see the website



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Chef Paul Torrance inspects the hors d'oeuvres prepared by students before lunch begins in the Conestoga Room, which is located at the Waterloo campus of Conestoga College on University Avenue East near Weber Street.

for detail) and can choose to have two, three or all four courses.

Wine or a cocktail is also available. A recent menu was typical of the offerings: a wild mushroom soup or warm spinach and goat cheese salad; halibut or chicken; leek pot pie or pork tenderloin medallions; and for dessert, chocolate mousse or apple crumble.

Depending on your choices, the price would range from \$11 to \$18 (payable with cash, debit, Mastercard or Visa.) The service is attentive, beginning in the parking lot — where a student gives diners a pass for free parking — through to the careful presentation of each dish. Tips go into a fund to take the students on a fine-dining excursion.

## Liaison College

The Kitchener location of Liaison College is in a small plaza at King Street East and Montgomery Road, close to Rockway Gardens.

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## Chef's school offers meals at Stratford restaurants

► Dining continued from E12

The dining room is located behind a reception area and seats about 25. Each meal offers a choice between two appetizers and two entrees — allowing the chefs to gain experience in responding to a sudden demand for one dish or another.

The area for "plating" the food is behind glass at one end of the dining room so that part of the day's student team can be seen setting up salads or desserts. The students, who are often people in the process of changing careers to something they've always loved, spend other course time learning business theory and planning.

A recent lunch menu (the price was \$18 including tax and tip, payable by cash, Visa, Mastercard or Amex) includes choices of artichoke arugula salad or mushroom torte, scallop and sunchoke ravioli or braised short ribs, and verbena crème brûlée.

The Liaison College lunches begin again on Feb. 10.

## Stratford Chefs School

The Stratford Chefs School's stated aim is to give its students "a thorough grounding in the theory and practice of classical cuisines in today's market."

The idea is to produce chef-patrons-owners as well as chefs so

the student in charge on the day's team is expected to plan the menu, cost it out, purchase ingredients and oversee production of the meal.

At one recent meal, for example, the prepared menu offered salmon fillets, but the day's chef had decided that local trout would be as tasty and more seasonal so the recipe was adapted to the market reality.

## If you go . . .

### For reservations:

- Conestoga Room: 519-883-0300 ext. 269
- Liaison College: 519-743-8335
- Stratford Chefs School: 519-271-1414

### Locations (and menus):

- Conestoga College, 180 University Ave. E., Waterloo (park off Marsland Drive) ([www.conestogac.on.ca/diningmenu](http://www.conestogac.on.ca/diningmenu))
- Liaison College, 1780 King St. E., Kitchener (King and Montgomery) ([www.liaisonkitchener.ca](http://www.liaisonkitchener.ca))
- Stratford Chefs School, at Pazzo, 70 Ontario St., Stratford ([www.stratfordchef.com](http://www.stratfordchef.com))

Student servers at the school delight in answering questions about the meal, by the way, since it gives them a chance to demonstrate their new culinary knowledge. Classes are taught in locations that make use of some of Stratford's gourmet restaurants during the off season when the Stratford Festival isn't.

Lunches are presented at Pazzo (70 Ontario St.) and dinners at the Old Prune Restaurant (151 Albert St.). Tips are not required, but if given, are added to a bursary fund for students.

A recent lunch menu (\$27 payable by cash, Amex, Visa, Mas-

tercard or debit) offered duck liver croutons, beet salad with walnuts, roast chicken with leek gratin and potatoes anna. For dessert there was chocolate almond cake with honeyed-walnut ice cream. Wine was also available.

A lunch or dinner at any of these schools will definitely brighten your February. Not only will someone cook for you, but you can taste out of the ordinary food that is presented with panache.

Vinnie Buchanan is a Kitchener writer. Her column, Out for the day, appears on the first Saturday of each month.