

# Dining In Class

## Culinaire Café

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**H**istoric downtown Cumberland is bustling with boutiques, art galleries, sidewalk festivals, cafes, commercial institutions, and special events. One of the town's most unique attractions in recent years combines the efforts of a local college, downtown mall managers, and government programs. Cumberland's Town Center hosts the Culinaire Café, a lunch time experience that offers soups, salads, sandwiches and entrees prepared by Allegany College students under the guidance of professionally trained chef-instructors.

The Culinaire Café's success would not have been possible without the vision and cooperation of residents who saw the potential of modifying a historic building and expanding programs at Allegany College of Maryland. According to David Sanford, Program Coordinator of Culinary Arts at Allegany College, the café had its genesis in conversations between Ed Mullaney and Sue Cerutti who sought to develop a program in the McCrory building that would attract young people to the downtown area.

Co-managers of the Downtown Mall, both Ed and Sue have been instrumental in Cumberland's renaissance and were seeking to find a sustainable program to rejuvenate the vacant McCrory building on Baltimore Street. Ed and

Sue approached Dr. Donald Alexander, President of Allegany College of Maryland, about viewing the property to see if a program could be incorporated into the building. Also attending the initial meeting was Deb Frank, Program Director for Hospitality Management at Allegany College, and David Sanford. At the conclusion of the discussion, Dr. Alexander asked Deb and David, "What do you think we can do?" The answer: a series of partnerships resulting in the Culinaire Café's grand opening in 2002.

Working with Appalachian Regional Commission matching grants, in-kind contributions from restaurants and private citizens, and matching college grants, three closely related programs were able to expand from their Willowbrook Road campus to Town Center: Culinary Arts, Hotel Management and Travel Tourism. Fortunately, Allegany County had already invested nearly one million dollars to upgrade the historic McCrory building into a business incubator project intending to attract commercial/retail interest to the site, so the location proved to be a good match. And the college programs work to coordinate their efforts at the Culinaire Café. According to Deb Frank, "The culinary arts students operate the kitchen and the hotel management students work the front of the house; the two programs operate simultaneously."


*Front (l to r): Dave Sanford, Program Coordinator of Culinary Arts at Allegany College of Maryland; Heather Bell, Ashley Lopez, Cheryl Combs, and Amanda Payne. Back (l to r): Justin Walker, Kevin Gamble, Caleb Exstrom, Stephen Scott, John Keller, Mike DeVore, and David Fringer.*



Students enrolled in Culinary Arts and Hotel Management programs must meet Allegany College academic requirements and be prepared to receive skill instructions and evaluations. David Sanford is a Culinary Institute of America graduate who oversees students training to be employed as cooks, sous-chefs, executive chefs, culinary educators, kitchen managers, and food sales representatives. “Our primary goal is to provide hands on, real life experiences that will translate into employment for our students. To accomplish that, we emphasize training fundamentals. Our students practice every day.” According to David, that training has paid dividends. “Ninety percent of our students already work in the industry because they are employed throughout the Tri-State area. Our students have been sought after and have been well received.” Evidence of the program’s success can be found in the 100 lunches served daily on a Tuesday through Friday schedule. An upstairs conference center equipped with 50 seats has recently been added so that students can plan for group events as well as individually prepared meals. Lecture rooms, a bakery, a dry storage room and first rate cooking equipment complete the facilities.

Typically 60 students are enrolled in the Culinary Arts and Hotel Management programs. Deb Frank notes, “Since we moved here, our enrollment has tripled. We now attract students from Somerset, Pennsylvania, and the Eastern shore of Maryland.” Due to an anticipated shortage of trained personnel in the culinary field, the state of Maryland has designated the ACM program to have in-county tuition rates for all Maryland residents. Allegany College has also partnered with Frostburg State University to provide an 18 credit hour offering for Recreational Leadership students, thus adding one more dimension to a successful program.

David Sanford states, “My biggest surprise is how the community has embraced us. We couldn’t practice our skills without community support. It’s amazing because we have friends coming to the café from all over the area.”

The Culinaire Café doors open at 11:30 AM on a Tuesday through Friday schedule, depending on the college calendar. So, head for Town Center, enjoy a delicious lunch, and witness a successful program in action. 

*Deb Frank, Program Director  
for Hospitality Management at  
Allegany College of Maryland.*



*Student, Stephen Scott,  
prepares cabbage for  
cole slaw.*



*Cheryl Combs, student,  
arranging fresh fruit bowls.*



*Student, Caleb Exstrom,  
displaying a tempting dessert tray.*



*Student, John Keller, prepares a flambé sauce.*