

The Stories Behind Food

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TRAVERSE CITY - One of the tastiest parts of joining the Writers Studio Program is the opportunity for writing students to report on the annual Cultural Food Fair hosted by the Northwest Ed Career Tech's Culinary Arts class.

The Culinary Arts program prepares students for professional kitchen work. Every spring, it hosts the Cultural Food Fair, where the students present dishes from around the world in relation to their own culture or heritage.

A young Culinary Arts student by the name of Michael presents his dish, chicken tikka masala. When asked about the choice of dish, he details how he felt, in a way, it connected him to his adopted cousin from India, with whom he is close. He gave a brief explanation of the dish's history, telling reporters that it originated in India but was stolen by and changed to suit British taste.

This event also invites other students and parents to enjoy the food, as well as judges to test the students' culinary skills.

Imagine walking into a room teeming with smells and flags of many countries. There are tables lined with foods from all over the world, and each one looks more delicious than the last. With

each display sits a presentation giving small facts about the food's origins and ingredients. The presentation is a break from the usual kitchen work.

Students from the Writers Studio program are given the opportunity to act as journalists during the Cultural Food Fair and get hands-on experience. They interview the students, instructors, and judges, as well as taste the participants' delicious treats. It gives the students time outside of the classroom to interact and communicate with their peers.

Writers Studio students arrive at the festival early, pens and journalistic notebooks at the ready. They witness part of the setup process and the tense atmosphere. Later, when they interview the participants, they ask about the stress that comes with cooking; most of the participants agree often that it is a very stressful act. Culinary students have to arrive early to reheat or make their dish, then they have to set up their table to display their food.

One reporter, Kacie Blanchette, caught the main instructor, Chef Amy Brooks, and got a new perspective from her. Chef Amy explained that the event incorporates both English and math, and that it is up to the students to research their dish's heritage, use their skills to cook it themselves, and then decorate.

When it came to portioning their food, the culinary students had prepared about half-cup serving portions, making sure everyone could have a bite. However, a first-year student named Oliver Roland, whose dish was shepherd's pie, gave out a full plate's worth. Two Writers Studio

reporters, Isabelle Plamondon and Radley Hafner-Fournet, were served the shepherd's pie; there was so much loaded onto the plate that they had to share one portion.

Of course, the Cultural Food Fair isn't the reporters' first experience with the Culinary Arts class. At the beginning of the year, the students observed the fire extinguisher training for the Culinary Arts class. They took notes and participated in hands-on demonstrations of fire extinguisher use. The students were also encouraged to conduct interviews after the demonstrations.

With simulation fires ablaze over the concrete of the Northwest Ed driveway and the heat of the early fall sun beating down, Culinary Arts and Writers Studio students alike were at the ready. With fire extinguishers in hand, they were given the opportunity to let loose and immerse themselves in a lesson of fire safety. The experience of hands-on learning marked the first of many yet to come.