

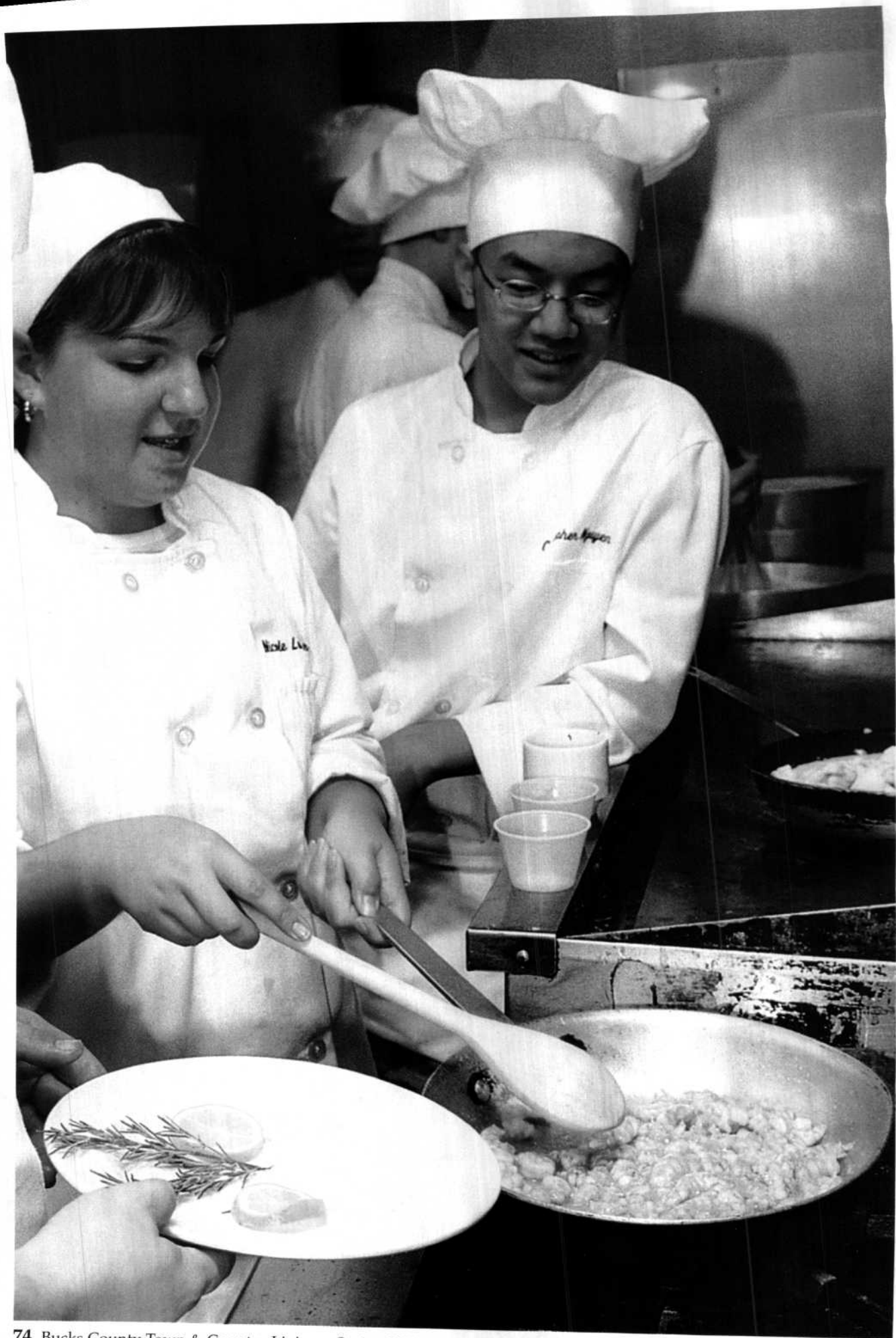
Savory Tech

The future chefs that attend Middle Bucks Institute of Technology learn by preparing fine foods that they serve in a restaurant appropriately called *Aspirations*

by Chrysa M. Smith

Top row, left to right: Fresh vegetables; Patrick Roberts alongside culinary concoctions on 'the line'; fresh vegetables are checked in and ready for the prep chef; instructor Mike McComb works with Caitlin McGowan and Anthony Wark; a well-presented plate. **Second row**: Fresh lobsters ready to boil; fresh vegetables; fresh cut pasta is laid out and ready for filing. **Third row**: One of the pieces prepared by the culinary arts group during its salad instruction; students Christopher McNeill, Joe Byrne and Travis Trottier; another salad prepared in salad class. **Fourth row**: Chris Nguyen and Vicki Handy prepare poultry before roasting; swan creme puffs prepared by the chefs-in-training; a fish on ice; Janessa Hershman adds the finishing touches to this chocolate cake; a fete-de-complete.

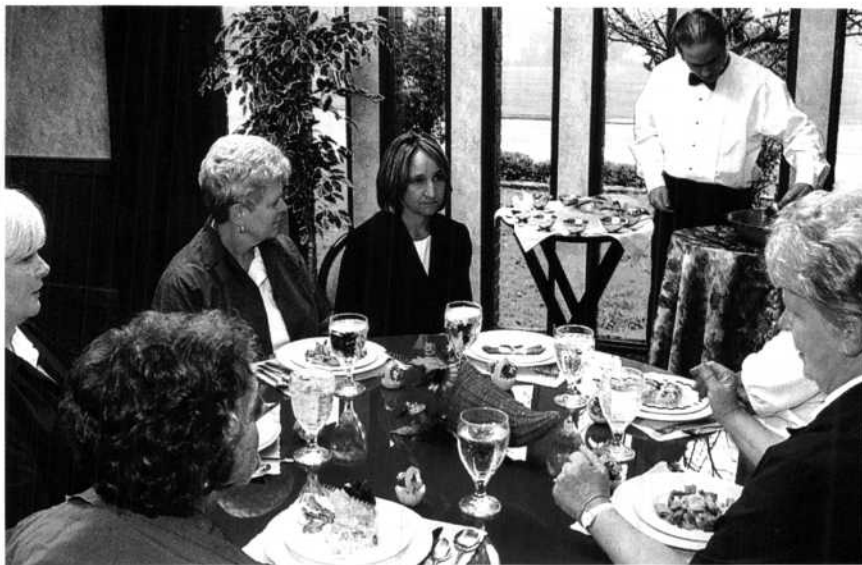
Photography by Randl Bye



It's Wednesday afternoon. The linens are crisp, the place settings set and the kitchen is bustling. The sun streaks in through the wall-length windows and dances across the elegant dining room tables. The wait staff makes its final preparations before guests come through the door. And the kitchen staff readies for today's selections: Sea Scallops Beurre Noisette (creamy hazelnut butter sauce with lemon), Grilled Mahi Mahi with pineapple chutney and Grilled Tilapia Filet with crayfish and hearty andouille sausage jambalaya, just to name a few. You might think you're dining in one of Bucks County's finer new restaurants, and you might be right. But Aspirations is no ordinary restaurant. It is the brainchild of the Middle Bucks Institute of Technology and is located within this regional technical school.

Yes, tech education has come a long way since many of us were of age. Lab now replaces the once virtual reality experience with a real life environment. For the culinary arts program, real life experiences run the gamut from sous chef and baker to dietician and executive chef. And Aspirations allows students the real life experience necessary to work at one of the highest levels of the food industry, namely owning, managing, cooking and serving customers in a fine dining establishment. "It's a real restaurant that's run and operated by students," says culinary instructor Michael McCombe, that now "raises the bar for students."

The culinary arts students were hardly strangers to preparing and serving food. Adjacent to Aspirations and the kitchen lies the school cafeteria and food court, where aspiring culinary students try their hand at one of the many stations. One day a student might be chopping potatoes for French fries or vegetables for salads. Another day will be spent baking

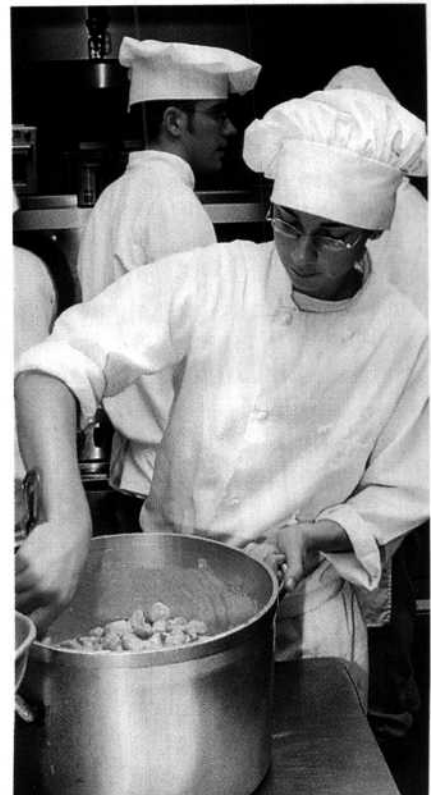
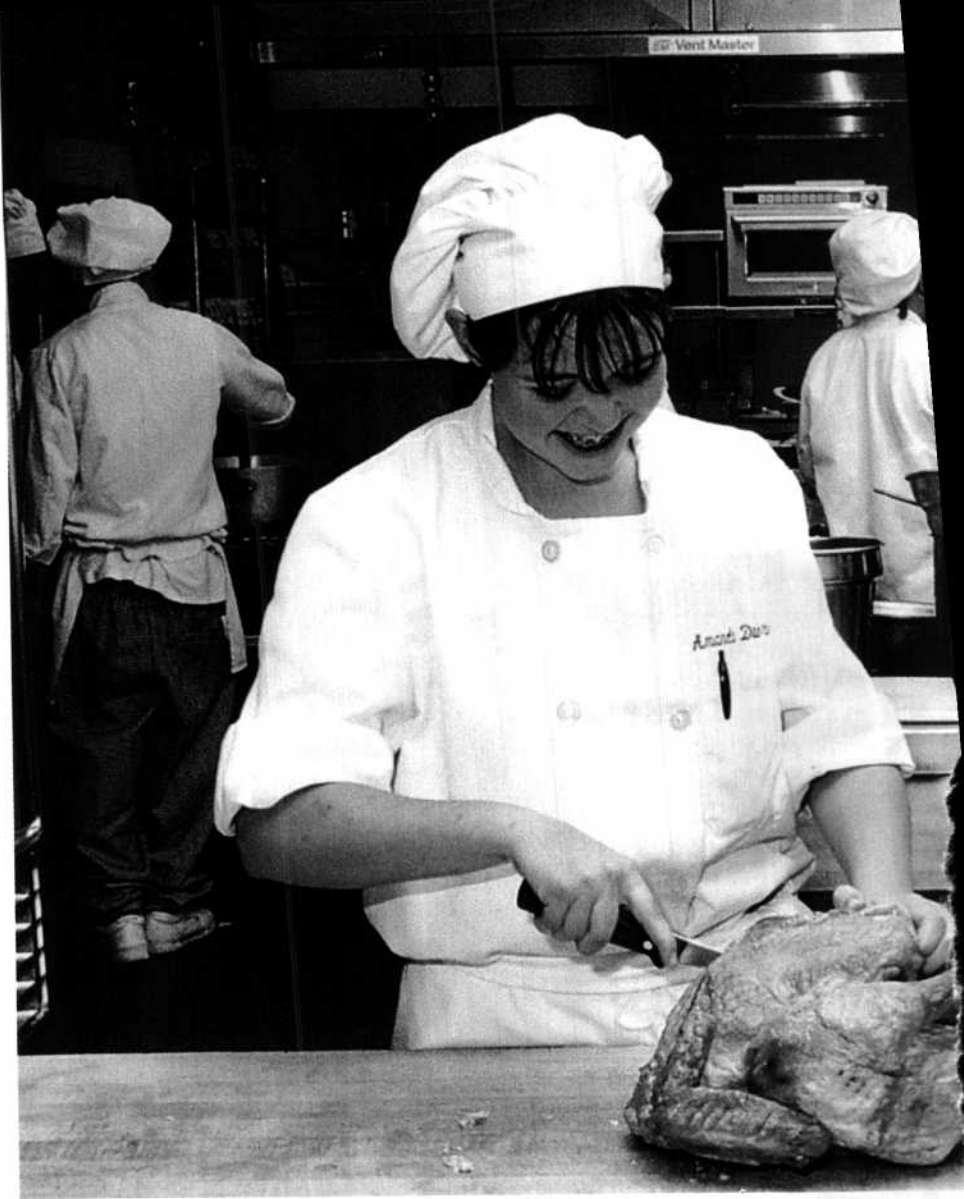


Opposite, Nicole Loudenslayer and Chris Nguyen work the saute' station. Top left, Benjamin Palker serving up Caesar salad tableside at Aspirations. Top right, Anthony Wark proudly displays his beautiful, big salad. Above, food court staff being served a Caesar salad at Aspirations. Left, a view of Aspirations, which is open to the public on Wednesdays and Thursdays throughout the school year.

brownies for dessert, serving food from behind the counter or ringing out students at the cash register. Students even order and receive deliveries of food, checking shipments for quality and freshness. In short, students do it all. Of course, qualified cafeteria help and culinary instructors stand ready to help when and where needed, but two things are quite obvious: there are no traditional lunch ladies here, nor stockpiles of prepared, packaged and processed foods. In fact, communication and marketing coordinator Lorraine Mayer believes "The school food is some of the best cafeteria food around. French fries are made from fresh potatoes, desserts are baked fresh daily."

"Raising the bar," as McCombe put it, means that Aspirations stretches students a bit further. Regardless of what they decide to do after they leave, they will have had the experience at the highest level of food service. And for the school, this addition gives the Institute an edge over many technical schools, whose culinary programs can't compete.

For instructors Mike McCombe and Mark Gage, Aspirations was a necessary step in the school's growth. When national test scores on food service came in lower than the above average scores they received in other culinary skills, the staff met with its advisory council and members of the school boards for the Central Bucks, Council Rock, New Hope/



Above, Amanda Durning carves the turkey while instructor Mike McConbe offers an approving smile. Bottom left, Charles Handy readies a seafood entree. Bottom right, Ryan McCarthy stirs the pot back in the school kitchen. Opposite bottom right, Christopher McNeill, Joe Byrne and Travis Trottier show off their sauté skills, behind the scenes at the Middle Bucks Institute of Technology.