



AMERICAN CULINARY FEDERATION PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

June 25, 2009

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What Does it Take to Become a “Certified Master Chef?”

There are only 59 CMCs in the nation, but earlier this month, 14 candidates got a taste of how much skill and practice goes into becoming one of the nation’s most distinguished chefs.

St. Augustine, Fla., June 25, 2009—The kitchens at Midwest Culinary Institute (MCI) in Cincinnati were filled with activity, focus and determination, May 31 through June 2, as 14 chefs hoping to become the next American Culinary Federation (ACF) certified master chefs (CMCs) attended a two-day assessment. Six current CMCs evaluated the candidates and their cooking to see if they are ready to train and prepare for the upcoming CMC practical exam—scheduled for fall 2010.



ACF Certified
Master Chef

“Today the foodservice industry recognizes the master chef as the highest level of professional certification in the culinary field. The American Culinary Federation has maintained high standards for the master chef certification, and at the same time has instituted mentoring and assessment programs to enable qualified candidates to attain this certification level,” said Ferdinand Metz, CMC, WGMC, AAC, HOF, president emeritus, The Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, N.Y.

To participate in the assessment, chefs were required to have a current approved CMC application, and be a certified executive chef (CEC). The assessment provided a real-world scenario for candidates to gain a better understanding of the demands of the CMC exam and a chance to be evaluated by current CMCs.

As in the real exam, candidates began the classical assignment—10 portions of soup, fish course and entrée, all prepared for Russian service—on the first morning of the two-day session. The classical cuisine assignment was designed to demonstrate the ability to understand, interpret and execute the philosophy of Auguste Escoffier and classical cuisine as described in *Le Guide Culinaire*. Candidates had a four-hour preparation window and a 30-minute service window. CMC evaluators were on hand during the process to work with candidates during preparation.

The second day featured the freestyle portion of the CMC exam, which is designed to demonstrate a candidate’s skills in relation to the construction and preparation of a menu. The freestyle assignment featured the development of 10 portions of an appetizer or soup, fish course, salad and main course.

Each day ended with a lecture recapping the day’s events. Evaluators reviewed pictures of each of the plates produced during the day, and critiqued all plates for the candidates.

“It was a great experience. I have done a lot of different CMC exam practices, but this was the closest thing to having us all understand what we were getting ourselves into,” said Shawn Hanlin, CEC, executive director, Oregon Coast Culinary Institute, Coos Bay, Ore., a member of ACF Bay Area Chefs Association of Oregon.

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“The greatest thing is that it almost felt like being on a culinary team again. We all worked together, and the camaraderie was so strong. We are going to continue to practice together.”

At the end of the two-day assessment, Hanlin and the other candidates took away a realistic picture of what the eight-day CMC exam will be like. They will take the advice of current CMCs and work on strengthening cooking skills, timing and stamina. For Hanlin, it comes down to: “Cook more, cook faster.”

Facts about CMCs:

- There are only 59 CMCs in the United States.
- To reach this level of designation—much like a lawyer’s or doctor’s credentials—a chef must first pass a written examination, followed by a strenuous eight-day practical exam, where they cook in front of peers and judges.
- If candidates fail one day of the practical exam, they are ineligible to continue.
- Two current CMCs must recommend the candidate.
- The CMC practical exam covers: healthy cooking, buffet catering, classical cuisine, freestyle cooking, global cuisine, baking and pastry, continental and northern Europe cuisines and market basket.
- Each category is graded in two parts: kitchen skills and presentation, and tasting.
- The minimum passing score is 70 points out of 100.

For more information about the CMC process, visit www.acfchefs.org and click on “careers” and “certification.” Stay tuned to ACF to see who will make it to the official CMC exam in fall 2010.

The American Culinary Federation, Inc., established in 1929, is the premier professional organization for culinarians in North America. With more than 22,000 members spanning 230 chapters nationwide, ACF is the culinary leader in offering educational resources, training, apprenticeship and accreditation. In addition, ACF operates the most comprehensive certification program for chefs in the United States. ACF is home to ACF Culinary Team USA, the official representative for the United States in major international culinary competitions, and to the Chef & Child Foundation, founded in 1989 to promote proper nutrition in children and to combat childhood obesity. For more information, visit www.acfchefs.org.

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TO SPEAK WITH A CERTIFIED MASTER CHEF, OR A CANDIDATE, PLEASE CONTACT LEAH CRAIG AT (800) 624-9458 EXT. 113, OR LCRAIG@ACFCHEFS.NET.