

MEDIA RELEASE

July 22, 2015
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
 MR15-052

NIC instructor crafts curriculum for cooks across Canada

Christine Lilyholm knows what it takes to be a master chef. The professional cook instructor at NIC is helping shape the curriculum for cooks across Canada.



NIC Professional Cook instructor Christine Lilyholm was chosen to help develop curriculum for cooks across Canada.

This spring, the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council selected her to help review the National Occupancy Standards for the emergent Line Cook program, a national online training and certification program, based in Ottawa.

"We are extremely proud of Christine and the extensive experience she brings to students nation-wide," said Cheryl O'Connell, NIC's Dean of Trades.

The program was chosen for a curriculum update to meet the high demand for cooks over the next decade. In B.C. alone, the B.C. Labour Market Outlook estimates the province will have 10,200 job openings for cooks by 2022.

"There are not enough students for the jobs out there," Lilyholm says.

Her experience in Ottawa confirmed her belief in B.C.'s curriculum and NIC's program which, along with local students' passion for food, create a perfect recipe for student success.

"You've got to have passion," she says. "You've got to love food and you've got to love what you do."

Lilyholm spices those ingredients with a dash of understanding, mixes in a willingness to learn, blends in the ability to adapt, bakes it into an NIC program, sets the table with real world experience and – voila – serves up a chef.

For her, the road to a professional career is not exactly as advertised on reality cooking shows.

"I always remind people TV is not real life," she says. "A lot students think they're going to become the next Iron Chef but there's a lot of hard work to get on top of that ladder."

Lilyholm should know. Her own career began in 1993 after completing two years of cooking school in Manitoba. She moved to B.C. to begin her apprenticeship in Victoria and worked up and down the Island. Then, after a decade in the industry, she began to teach, beginning her current position with NIC in 2004.

"Some of my co-workers and employees at the time recommended teaching to me," Lilyholm says. "But I had my doubts. I thought 'I'm not a teacher, I'm a chef.' Then, I realized, as a chef you are always teaching, so it seemed like a natural fit."

Since 2004, she has trained 170 rising chefs in three levels of Professional Cook training at NIC's Campbell River campus, including more than a dozen students in recent years who have competed at regional and provincial Skills Canada and Vancouver Hot competitions.

Her ability to step back and evaluate what she's doing lends itself to teaching.

"To be successful, you need to put everything into perspective and adapt," she says. "Change happens. You may order a case of chicken but if it doesn't arrive, you need to adjust your menu because customers have to eat."

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NIC has a reputation for providing well-trained chefs and tourism students. Each level of Professional Cook training includes in-school training, practical and theoretical examinations and workplace hours. Students range from high school students, completing the first level of training before graduation, to adults shifting careers.

"We seek out NIC-trained chefs and tourism students because we know they have the practical training we need. We know because we went there," said Carmen Amberson, an NIC tourism diploma graduate who is also the general manager of Gowlland Harbour Oceanfront Resort on Quadra Island with her husband and executive chef Joe Volk. "

This winter, NIC students will learn to cook on their feet in the Third Course Bistro, a student-run restaurant on campus. There, students plan, cook, and create menus in a public fine dining restaurant open two evenings a week in February and March.

Students also work at various high-profile North Vancouver Island Chefs Association events, where they meet chefs and industry professionals. The association supports the program and students with generous bursaries every year.

For Lilyholm, industry events, student skill development, and now, a national curriculum development opportunity keep her inspired.

"The great thing about this industry is, you're always continuing to learn. You could cook for 40 years and still go in and learn something," she says. "It's always new, whether it's the food, people, equipment, or events – it's ever-changing and incredibly fun."

For more information on NIC's Professional Cook program, starting this September, or instructor Christine Lilyholm, visit www.nic.bc.ca/trades.

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