

Top chefs to teach their craft

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ST. CATHARINES -- Imagine enjoying an evening out on the town, complete with music, wine and delicious food.

Now picture that same evening with a unique twist where people can learn how to prepare the luxurious meal they've just consumed at home with the expertise of some of Niagara's top chefs. Throughout March and early April, four Niagara chefs will teach you how to cook like the gourmet you've longed to be as Mainstream Services presents its second Cooking With Class sessions, a five-week lesson plan in the art of cooking which will pair four of the region's top chefs with local wineries to present evenings of inspiring cuisine prepared and served in an elegant atmosphere.

Featuring chefs Mark Picone of Mark Picone Culinary Studio in Vineland, Patrick Engel of Beamsville's The Good Earth Cooking School, Niagara-on-the-Lake's Tony De Luca from The Old Winery Restaurant and Ross Midgely of Zee's, each evening is set to be an intimate and interactive experience said Mainstream's Communications and Community Development Coordinator Kristine Akilie.

"Each class is limited to 12 to 24 guests so the learning experience will be personal," Akilie said. "All the chefs were quite happy to lend their talents and give back to the community. The evening will provide lessons and great memories."

Mainstream Services is a non-profit organization with a mission statement is to improve quality of life for people with a developmental challenge by providing a supportive environment that strives to empower individuals with the necessary skills and confidence for lifelong learning and growth.

The organization currently serves 240 individuals and has been providing services and support to the region since 1984.

The inaugural Cooking With Class last year had a turn out of about 100 people and raised \$10,000 for Mainstream Services.

Akilie said each evening will feature three hours of "edutainment," with guests learning how to prepare four-course meals and pair them with different wines.

"It's a win-win situation for everyone," Akilie said.

Chef Picone will open his Culinary Studio in Beamsville March 1 and by popular demand will wrap up the event with a repeat session April 5. Picone said it'll be a unique experience to teach guests within his element and it'll be a pleasurable experience for them as well as for himself.

"It's always great to be doing something nice, especially giving back to the community, which is something I've always believed in," Picone said. "As for what I'm going to be preparing both sessions, it'll be a surprise."

Tickets for Cooking For Class are \$125 a person per evening and available by calling 905-934-3924. For more information on Mainstream Services, visit www.mainstreamservices.com.