

A Culinary Program A Cut Above The Rest

CHAMBERLAIN JOINS FORCES WITH OUTBACK STEAKHOUSE

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Outback Steakhouse has teamed up with Chamberlain High School to construct a one-of-a-kind working version of its famous restaurant chain on the school's campus.

Erik Young is a teacher at Chamberlain, and the culinary program's head coordinator. He has been in charge of the development of the Outback teaching restaurant, which opens early next year.

The Chamberlain culinary program currently features courses in pastry baking, culinary tech skills and hospitality. The hospitality classes will utilize the new Outback facility.

Young, a former chef, previously worked at Hillsborough High School. There he began an association with Pete May, who serves as Joint Venture Partner for Outback restaurants. When Young transferred to Chamberlain, he used his relationship with Outback primarily as a mentorship opportunity for his culinary students. It eventually led to tours of Outback's facilities.

"Then the idea came about: let's take it to the ultimate level," said Young. The Outback partnership was born, and plans began to build a state-of-the-art teaching facility that would be unlike any other in Florida.

The school board approved a construction budget of \$192,352 this year to create the restaurant/teaching facility on Chamberlain's grounds. Before the projects inception, the Hillsborough County School District has the highest concentration of culinary programs in the state.

"It was a long process getting the funding from the county," said Young. "It was getting scary for awhile, but we finally got it done."



STEPHEN HAMMILL / Staff photos

Erik Young, head coordinator of the Chamberlain/Outback program, points to the new facility's garden, where fruits and herbs are already growing. At left, construction crew member Billy Zimmer works on wiring at the new Outback educational restaurant on the campus of Chamberlain High School.



once-a-week for dining to faculty, staff and business-partners of the program. This will give the students an opportunity to put what they have learned into real-world implementation.

When asked what can be expected of the facility when complete, Young replied, "anything you would expect at the heart of house or front of house for a restaurant." Front of house refers to areas of the building that the public has access to, while the heart of house implies the offices.

The replica facility will be very faithful to its real-world counterpart in everything from the purple ceiling to the wood flooring to the Australian-themed décor, but with subtle changes meant to substitute patrons' entertainment with students' education. There will be hanging televisions, but in this Outback they will transmit educational materials in place of sporting

events, though it can still use improvements, Young added.

"Although we can't grow physically anymore, we can still grow as a program," he said.

Young is optimistic that the new facility will open in early February.

The culinary program at Chamberlain boasts 232 students, with 54 in the upper program. About 18 students at a time will work in the new dining room.

The students on campus are excited about the new face of the program. Lauren Miller, senior, 17 years old, has been in the culinary arts program for three years now.

"I've always enjoyed baking," she said. Although she'll only get to experience the new facility for one semester, she thinks it will be a great addition to the program.

Booster club member Pat Levin's son, Brett, donated the garden behind the Outback.

"I'm very proud of him," said Levin. Brett, an Eagle Scout, is in the culinary program. Large bay windows will look out onto the garden and to a plaque in his name. The garden will feature all kinds of fruit trees and herbs for use in the program. There are also plans to build a large outdoor grill.

Pete May, Joint Venture Partner for Outback, believes the program falls in line with Outback's mission to give back to the community. Where many other community outreach ventures benefit their patrons, however, this program's goal is "to continually give back to the future of our industry. We want to give the young people experiences dealing with the industry."

May hopes programs like this inspire other people in his industry to get more involved.

"With the cutbacks taking place, it's so important to give opportunities where there may not be any," he said. "This is the first time anything like this has been done. This is definitely going to draw attention."

at the bar, there will be no alcohol served, but instead coffee, and on the back wall where a bar would typically display its bottled brands, the program will instead display the awards it has garnered.

Young sees this facility as a chance for the students to learn how money is made in the hospitality business. He pointed out a curved table space where guest lecturers will talk with students and teach their craft. This year the program welcomed two master chefs.

Booth seating, with both square and round tables, will allow teachers to demonstrate different types of service training.

"We want to give these kids real-world experience by allowing them to keep the integrity of the Outback," Young said.

The food is all prepared in the kitchen next-door. That kitchen is already fully furn-