

Chef Nicole Gaffney Teaches A.C. High School Students to Cook at Stockton's Campus Kitchen

Stockton Center for Community Engagement Helps Feed Area Families

For Immediate Release; with photos on [flickr](#)

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Galloway Township, NJ - "Let's use what we have," said "Food Network Star" contestant Nicole Gaffney of Brigantine, throwing onions, peppers, tomatoes, chicken and rice in a pan to show students at Atlantic City High School how to quickly create a nutritious meal without expensive ingredients.

Today's lesson helped to launch the Stockton Center for Community Engagement's fifth year of the Campus Kitchen project, in collaboration with the Atlantic City Board of Education, Atlantic City High School and Sodexo, which provides food services to Atlantic City schools. The local program is affiliated with the national Campus Kitchens project.

The program feeds about 2,500 families from Atlantic City, Absecon, Egg Harbor Township and Pleasantville during the school year, using food donated from the Food Bank of South Jersey, Sodexo and other contributors. About seven-10 Stockton students work alongside five-10 high school students to cook the meals on Mondays, then plate and deliver them on Tuesdays.

Stockton student Jessica Ryan of Freehold, NJ, has been volunteering for three years and runs the shift crews for both cooking and delivering. On Monday, they were making about 60 hot meals using Gaffney's dish. "I like to do a lot of different things with chicken and vegetables," Ryan said. Rona Whitehead, of Waterford Township, Stockton's activist-in-residence, also pitched in to chop onions.

"As our region experiences the closing of casinos, many families will have to do more in their kitchen with less," said Dr. Merydawilda Colon, interim executive director of the SCCE.

Gaffney pointed out that "rice is good to feed a lot of people - you just add more to stretch it." She had the students smell the cumin, coriander and other spices she was using, and talked about the other ingredients: "We grow the best tomatoes in New Jersey - never forget that."

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Gaffney, who grew up in Egg Harbor Township, was a finalist last month on the “Food Network Star” contest. She told the students: “Never give up. I came in third. But I’m not going to hang up my chef coat - I’m trying to get another TV show.”

“Can you husband cook?” asked Veronica Mackey, 16, a high school junior from Brigantine.

Gaffney said her firefighter husband, Chaser, who graduated from Atlantic City High School, sometimes cooks at the Atlantic City firehouse where he works and occasionally makes her a meal. But he doesn’t go in for fancy recipes or techniques.

“That’s it?” she said she asked when he presented her with plain baked chicken.

Gaffney said it was intimidating to go on “Food Network Star,” where you are sequestered and can’t talk to family or friends, watch TV, have an internet connection - or even read a book.

“You’re left with your own thoughts,” she said. “It taught me a lot about who I am and where I want to go in life.”

She’s currently doing cooking demonstrations at events, including the upcoming Philadelphia Festival of Food, Wine and Spirits in Valley Forge Oct. 17-19. She said she’s renovating her home kitchen to make instructional cooking videos and has a blog: toofullforschool.com

Gaffney volunteered her time to partner with Stockton and also will be speaking to the college’s cooking club. She will be writing recipes based on donations Stockton receives in a food drive that kicks off on Oct.16, said Dr. Colon.

Stockton will begin collecting food from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. on the third Thursday of every month starting next month and will deliver it after 2 p.m., Dr. Colon said. The SCCE also provides food for children in a program at Stanley Holmes Village in Atlantic City and no donations will go to waste, she said.

To make a donation of food, please contact Dr. Colon at 609-652-4535.

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