

# NORTH HILLS

## MONTHLY

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## COOKING CLASSES

### Appetite Growing for Local Cooking Classes

By Shelly Rushe

Do you want to learn the difference between flambé and sauté? Are you interested in learning to cook a foreign cuisine? Do you spend hours watching Top Chef or leafing through your recent copy of Bon Appétit? Maybe you're looking to save a few dollars on those expensive restaurant meals. If so, it's time to get your apron on and get to a cooking class!

There are all sorts of motives for choosing to take a class. From socializing, to learning a new skill, to connecting with your heritage, there is no shortage of opportunities to find the perfect culinary course for you.

Many local community colleges offer classes as part of their non-credit programs. Paul Lucas, director of lifelong learning for Butler County Community College (BC3), sees men and women in their mid-30s to mid-50s signing up for culinary classes. "More than likely, they are foodies who can't get enough of Food Network or grew up watching culinary shows on PBS," he said.

Other students choose cooking classes based on their desire to learn how to make their grandma's cabbage rolls or Aunt Agatha's baklava. Rita Venturino teaches her students to make traditional Italian repasts such as eggplant parmesan, Italian love knots and gnocchi and seafood at her Gibsonia school Rita Venturino's Italian Table. "Many of the students have an opportunity to share their heritage through cooking...be it Italian or otherwise," she explained.

Some cooking classes offer the chance to learn a specific skill. Soergel Orchards in Wexford occasionally offers classes in jam making and McGinnis Sisters' Adams Township location offers healthy crockpot and Mommy & Me cooking classes. BC3 provides students with a taste of colonial cooking by teaching students how to cook over an open fire with cast iron cookware during its Early American Hearth Cooking series at The Old Stone House in Slippery Rock. Crate Cooking School in Pittsburgh offers a Baking Boot Camp and a sushi course and Meetup.com lists groups who meet to learn how to prepare vegan meals. Those who are concerned with their health can join a Meetup.com gluten-free group or take advantage of classes for diabetics and cancer patients provided by local hospitals and medical facilities. Prices for classes vary greatly, ranging from free to approximately \$60.

Even if you already know the basics, learning cooking techniques with friends, family or a significant other can be a productive and enjoyable way to spend time together. Going it alone? It's a great way to meet new people. "It gives you a reason to do something with a friend or enables you to meet new people with similar interests," observed Lucas. Some personal chefs will even host cooking classes in a person's home for a party of their closest friends.

Being able to recreate your favorite restaurant-quality meals at home is not only a skill you can use to impress friends and family, but it also saves you money. Forget spending \$50 per person at a four-star restaurant; you can whip up that five-course meal right in your own kitchen for a fraction of the cost. According to a recent Wall Street Journal article entitled "Cutting Costs at Culinary School" by Dawn Fallik, many cooking schools across the country have seen an uptick in those signing up for cooking classes in the current economy; those looking to save money by staying home want more than ramen noodles and PB&J.

At the end of the day, it is still about learning for most. "Students learn many kitchen tricks to make their cooking experience a pleasure rather than a chore," said Venturino.

"People who attend our courses learn new culinary skills," agreed Lucas. "They gain the courage to try culinary feats they might not try otherwise."

