

Dakota culinary arts teacher named Chef Educator of the Year

Zampich will go on to compete for national title in July



Chippewa Valley Schools' Chef Russell Zampich was recently named the Chef Educator of the Year by the American Culinary Federation, chapter of chefs, Michigan Chefs de Cuisine Association. (PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSSELL ZAMPICH)

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Chef Russell Zampich has the right recipe for creating the next generation of top chefs at Dakota High School, work that was recently recognized by his peers as he has been named Chef Educator of the Year.

Zampich received the recognition at the American Culinary Federation, chapter of chefs, Michigan Chefs de Cuisine Association on Jan. 22, accepting a medal at the MotorCity Casino Hotel in Detroit. Zampich also earned the opportunity to compete for a national title at the American Culinary Federation National Convention this July in Arizona.

Zampich said in addition to general kitchen knowledge, he hopes every student who takes his courses at Dakota High School will learn business and listening skills.

“The top one would probably be professionalism. Dress appropriately. Work ethics. And then the other one would be to listen to your chef. He might show you a different way to do things. Don’t be close minded about it,” Zampich said.

Zampich has been in the culinary industry since he was age 15, and has been an executive chef for over 25 years. He is a 1989 graduate of Chippewa Valley High School, where he was a student in

the culinary arts program. Zampich said his interest in becoming a chef was sparked by learning to cook with his grandmother.

“It’s one of those old traditional stories. We cooked birthday dinners and stuff together. I decided at a young age to go into culinary and become a chef. I enjoyed cooking,” Zampich said.

He earned an associate’s degree from Macomb Community College during 1992-93, in Applied Sciences, certificates in Culinary Arts, Hospitality and Culinary Arts, Food Production. Some of his career experience includes working at a casino, a hotel and at Boulder Pointe Golf Club in Oxford. Zampich said his interest in teaching culinary arts to students began at the club, where he found himself teaching 15 and 16-year-olds basic culinary knowledge such as sanitation and knife use.

Zampich earned his bachelor’s degree in vocational education from Ferris State University. He graduated Summa Cum Laude in 2018.

He currently teaches the culinary arts program for high school students in the Chippewa Valley Schools district, teaching both Chippewa Valley and Dakota students at Dakota in Macomb Township.

“I worked in the industry for quite a few years, and then I was doing career day over at Dakota,” Zampich said.

This led to his doing some teaching in addition to his work in the culinary field, and by 2018, he began teaching full time at Dakota instructing about 70 students a year.

“They show me a lot of growth. Doing this is very rewarding, to watch someone with no culinary skills develop skills and do well outside in the world,” Zampich said.

Students in the culinary arts program at Dakota gain skills and knowledge via use of the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation ProStart program. Several classes are a part of the program, as well as a culinary arts internship. ProStart is a two-year high school restaurant and food service management curriculum that blends classroom learning with mentored work experience and national competitions. Those who meet the academic standards, complete a checklist of competencies and participate in a minimum of 400 hours of mentored work experience are awarded an industry-recognized ProStart National Certificate of Achievement.

“We start going into where they want to go to college, how they can use their culinary skills inside a kitchen. There is a lot more detail involved, especially in year two. So we talk about resumes, work ethic, doing a lot of things they need to do in a kitchen,” Zampich said.

Students have a chance to hone their culinary skills through the school-run restaurant, The Meeting Grounds. Zampich said that students participate in a variety of roles within the restaurant business at The Meeting Grounds, taking responsibility for all facets of food production and customer service. A few of the skills utilized include menu planning, restaurant management, sanitation management and accounting.

The Meeting Grounds is open to the public most weeks during the school year, Wednesday through Friday from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.. Those who attend must go through security check in, and calling ahead at 586-723-2840 is recommended.

Zampich has been a member of the American Culinary Federation, chapter of chefs, Michigan Chefs de Cuisine Association since 1999. He received his certified executive chef designation through the American Culinary Federation in 2012. He additionally earned his American Culinary Federation certified culinary educator status in 2022.