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Not too tough to swallow

By Lauren DeFilippo

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HANSON - [Bob Cioffi is a welcoming guy. Twice a month, he opens the kitchen of his restaurant, Bernardo's, Hanson, to a class of eager students.](#)

In three hours, he teaches people how to make at least a dozen restaurant-quality dishes with fresh, simple ingredients. Then, the group sits down to eat, drink and chat.

"I don't like to do one dish at a time," Cioffi said with a smile as he began his class May 20.

The agenda that night included more than a dozen recipes for pasta.

"When you talk pasta, we could go on for years," Cioffi said. "All pasta tastes the same."

Minutes later, he already has three weathered sautee pans spread out across several burners of his stove.

Each pan contains a slightly different sauce – one made with mushrooms and onions, another with cream, and others made with tomatoes, and even brown sugar and butter.

Cioffi finishes off every dish with some cheese.

He doesn't use salt when he cooks, and reminds his students that adding spices like cheese and ground pepper is a matter of taste, and varies from person to person.

"Every dish is totally different from the other," he said, adding that his approach to cooking is mostly guesswork.

Through the classes, Cioffi said he hopes to alleviate a fear of cooking, and encourage people to experiment with combinations of ingredients in their own homes.

For Bridgewater resident Nancy Dexter, Bernardo's is like a second home.

A regular at the restaurant, Dexter said she started coming to the cooking classes to learn how to make simple meals, at home.

"I love to entertain," she said, "but I'm always afraid to try something new with friends. He makes it so simple. I'm just not afraid now."

That simplicity also appealed to Eileen Capellupo. The Hanson resident said her favorite dish that night was the fettucini alfredo – a cheese and cream sauce.

She has a recipe for the dish at home, but never makes it since it requires standing over the stove for three hours.



Jacob Belcher

Enjoying the company of good friends and delicious food, cooking students Nancy Dexter, left, of Bridgewater, and Debbie Holmes of Brookton, share a laugh at Bernardo's Restaurant in Hanson while Larry Root, right, of Hanson, looks on.

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Cioffi's sauce was ready in about 10 minutes.

In addition to getting a glimpse at the speed and ease of cooking, Cioffi's class also offers students a behind-the-scenes and personal look at what goes into each plate.

"It is a personal touch to see how he comes up with dishes," Larry Root of Hanson said.

The only prep Cioffi does for the classes is chopping vegetables and maybe pre-cooking some of the pasta part of the way.

But, as he cooks, he describes how and why the ingredients are going together, and why they work.

And, the proof is in the pudding, since students get to taste the results at the end of class.

Mary Rose Sherman, of Halifax, regularly attends class with a notebook in hand. Afterwards, she copies all the recipes onto cards.

"My husband loves it because he's getting something different each night," she said. "Pasta will never be boring again."

Halifax resident Frank Krueger said his favorite recipe was the roasted asparagus over pasta with a brown sugar and butter sauce.

For him, taking the class allows him to ask questions about the dishes, and find out what and how to substitute different ingredients since he and his wife are trying to limit the amount of butter in their diets.

"He has interesting ideas of how to cook healthy," he said of Cioffi's style.

Cioffi started hosting the cooking classes in January with 16 students. After the first classes, interest in the participating doubled, he said. Now, he has a waiting list of 50-60 people.

For each class, Cioffi asks his students to fill out profile sheet to explain what they hope to get out of the class. Those answers help shape the agenda.

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