

Kansas City Star, The (MO)

2007-03-25

Section: News

Page: B11

Cooking up solutions to end poverty's cycle

RHONDA CHRISS LOKEMAN The Kansas City Star

Jessica Bero is looking for a few good chef's apprentices. Not people who want to spend their lives saying, "You want fries with that?"

What Chef Bero wants has nothing to do with her necessarily. She has her credentials from the **Culinary** Institute of America and a bachelor's degree in hospitality studies from the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She runs her own personal-chef business, Kansas City-based Everyday Gourmet.

Now she wants to share the experience and share the wealth that can be made in food service. She wants to make sure that people unable to spend thousands of dollars to attend **culinary** school can at least get the training to pursue higher-paying opportunities and be able to skip back-breaking kitchen work for minimum wage.

Bero is drumming up recruits for **Culinary Cornerstones**, a program operated by her employer, Episcopal Community Services, 13th Street and Broadway. The 24-week program is supported by various grants and philanthropic contributions.

The deadline to apply is April 6. Applications are available at the Kansas City Community Kitchen, in the basement of Grace & Holy Trinity Cathedral, also at 13th and Broadway.

The first session begins April 16. Bero hopes for a minimum of 10 people and to provide four sessions this year.

"Anybody can pretty much go to McDonald's and get a job," Bero said. "I want people to set their sights a little higher. If they don't want to always work on the line, perhaps they can get into catering or sales. This is just a platform for them to stand on."

The first six weeks of the program will focus on nutrition, lifestyle issues and **culinary** measurements. The next six weeks will be devoted to classical French techniques for making sauces, breads and other baked goods. Bero, a member of Beth Shalom congregation, also cooks kosher.

The final 12 weeks will be spent in internships where trainees put their skills to practical use in area food businesses.

Bero has extended the application deadline because not enough people have applied. One recruitment challenge, she said, is finding people able to put their lives on hold for 24 weeks.

"One of the obstacles we're having is that some people can't go 12 weeks without a paycheck. That is, unless they receive a stipend from some other source to make it through the program," Bero said.

Suggestion: Why don't some Kansas City area folks agree to sponsor each of the 10 trainees to improve their standard of living? The federal government ought to do this, but don't count on it.

The more willing we are to pull people out of poverty, the more people are able to find well-paying jobs, contribute to the economy and make it on their own. There are small but important steps that can be taken to end a cycle of poverty that permeates generations. Incidentally, la technique and la methode won't be all that's taught at **Culinary Cornerstones**.

"This is about job creation, about filling out job applications, showing up for work on time," Bero said. "There's a lot of discipline involved. You're working with knives, with fire, you wear a uniform. There are guidelines for health and food preparation you have to follow."

Such training will help in the final 12 weeks, when trainees are expected to look for internships at area businesses. Bero said they will have to look for themselves rather than have opportunities handed to them by **Culinary Cornerstones**.

"I guess I sort of look at that as cheating," Bero said. "We want people to feel like they got the job on their own, because they had the skills and training." This is as much about empowerment as education.

Bon appetit!

Rhonda Chriss Lokeman is a nationally syndicated columnist for Creators Syndicate. You can read her Creators column on national affairs Sundays on The Star's Web site, KansasCity.com. Today she reminds President Bush to stand up to Venezuela's Hugo Chavez. Her Star column will emphasize more local and bistate issues and appear in this space.

To reach Rhonda Chriss Lokeman, call (816) 234-4475 or send e-mail to lokeman@kcstar.com.

Graphic (illustration)

STEVE ANSUL - NEWSART



[News](#) | [Business](#) | [Sports](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Living](#) | [Shop Local](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Cars](#) | [Real Estate](#)
[About kansascity.com](#) | [About the Real Cities Network](#) | [About the McClatchy Company](#)
[Privacy Policy & Terms of Use](#) | [Copyright](#)