

County commercial kitchen picking up steam

By BRIANNA LOPER
brianna@masoncounty.com

Sensational smells wafted around Mason County Transit-Community Center on Tuesday night, as scents of peppers and meatballs drift around the rainy night.

If someone were to follow their nose, they'd find themselves in the hot, steamy kitchen on the backside of the transit-community center.

While everywhere else was dark on this drizzly night, the kitchen was hopping as chef Kern Dolby taught eager participants how to make a homemade Italian meal.

The cooking class is part of a new continuing education series through Olympic College, which utilizes the transit-community center's commercial kitchen to teach participants different styles of cooking.

One participant, Julie Jones, hesitantly raised her hand as Dolby taught students how to boil a sauce to reduce it. "I'd be scared to let it boil that long," she said. Others in the class nodded their heads in agreement.

"Why?" Dolby asked, as he dunked a spoon in the concoction to quickly taste-test the sauce.

"Well, I wouldn't know



Journal photos by Brianna Loper
Chef Kern Dolby, owner of Kern's Kitchen food truck, mixes spices into a Caesar dressing during a cooking class at the Mason Transit Authority Transit-Community Center on Tuesday. The cooking class is part of a new continuing education series through Olympic College, which utilizes the transit center's commercial kitchen to teach participants different styles of cooking.

Part 1 of 2

that's what it's supposed to do," Jones said with a laugh. "I guess I've already learned something, so thank you!"

The commercial kitchen at the transit-community center has slowly filled up during the past nine months.

Sometimes, at 4:30 in the morning, before the sun has even risen, a baker can be seen using the kitchen to create tasty goods for their shop. The kitchen is even busy late at night, when local caterers use it to prepare meals for upcoming events.

"It's open 24 hours a day," said Kathy Geist, manager for the Transit-Community Center. "People could use it whenever they want, to make whatever they need."

Before the transit-community center opened last April, Geist said there was much discussion about whether the center needed a commercial kitchen.

The original plans for the center called for a regular-sized kitchen. Instead, Geist brought up the idea for a com-



Faie Heggun looks at a sauce during the class.

mmercial-grade kitchen.

"At the time, I don't think we had another one like it in the county," she said. "But it was a big need for this community."

Geist, who worked in the business-licensing department of the city for 19 years, said she saw many people seeking restaurant permits who abandoned their idea after realizing they needed to build a large, expensive commercial kitchen

from caterers to food truck owners use the kitchen to create goods they can sell.

"Everything is getting a lot of use," she said.

The kitchen can be rented for \$10 an hour for catering uses, or the entire kitchen and dining area — which seats 35 people — can be rented for \$30 an hour.

Commercial kitchens are held to a higher standard than a regular home kitchen. Because of health laws, anyone selling food must use a commercial kitchen to prepare it.

Commercial kitchens generally have plumbing systems that provide hotter, cleaner water, accurate and consistent refrigeration systems, floor drains and high-impact ventilation systems.

Geist said the kitchen at the transit-community center has doubled space with two refrigerators, high-powered stoves and freezers, as well as four catering warming units.

"It really is a fantastic kitchen," she said.

But the kitchen isn't the only thing filling up, Geist said.

During a regular week, the 260-person gym is rented out all day long, five days a week for recreational activities.

The storefronts for rent in front of the transit authority are also full and operating well, Geist said. Two of those storefronts will be up for lease in the coming months, and Geist said the business the transit authority gets the most requests for is a coffee shop.

"Several people every single day ask us if they can get coffee here," she said. "With half a million riders every year coming through here, a coffee shop would do really, really well."

Cooking classes at the kitchen are available through Olympic College's community education program. For more information, visit www.olympic.edu.

For more information on renting the facility, call 432-5754, or email Geist at kgeist@masortransit.org.

Para 2 of 2