

Restaurants Special

Looking to Go Pro?

A survey of area cooking schools

Culinary school: who needs it, right? Charlie Trotter dropped out; Thomas Keller never went. Some see it as an ivory tower that's no substitute for the frying-pan-to-fire skills learned in a real working kitchen. Even Anthony Bourdain, a Culinary Institute of America grad, has said he'd rather hire an experienced dishwasher than a culinary school graduate. But faculty, administrators, and students across the city argue that there's no better way to get a well-rounded education in a such a short period of time—two years on average. And with the food-service industry growing at warp speed (the National Restaurant Association predicts 61,100 new jobs in the field in the next ten years in Illinois alone) culinary school might just be a better investment than that English degree. In addition to a mess of classes for the home cook at places like the Chopping Block and Sur la Table, enrollment at the city's cooking schools is booming. Which one's right for you? —Martha Bayne and Jeffrey Felshman



COOKING AND HOSPITALITY INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

361 W. Chestnut | 312-944-0882 or 877-828-7772 | chic.edu

DEGREES Associate of Applied Science in culinary arts and baking and pastry with a Le Cordon Bleu diploma; night school track available.

IN BRIEF Founded in 1983, CHIC turned out 508 graduates last year, with a new batch of students matriculating every six weeks. In 2000 it hooked up with the 111-year-old Paris-based Le Cordon Bleu, an internationally recognized school grounded in classical French technique. The facility also recently expanded from 8 to 13 teaching kitchens. The comprehensive 15-month program includes course work in restaurant management, general education courses in English comp, math, and nutrition, and a three-month externship.

TEACHING RESTAURANT CHIC Cafe, 361 W. Chestnut, 312-873-2032

WHAT THE SCHOOL SAYS “We are the only Le Cordon Bleu school in the Great Lakes



Illustrations by Paul Dolan

Saving Kendall

The kitchens on its Goose Island campus are stocked with state-of-the-art equipment and the halls are bustling with future chefs and restaurateurs. But not four years ago Kendall College was a sinking ship.

By Martha Bayne



Classes at the Kendall College culinary school

On the fourth day of the spring quarter at Kendall College students in its culinary school were already hard at work learning to make sauce Portugaise, assemble vegetable terrines, and laminate dough for turnovers and croissants—192 layers of butter and dough for the croissants, 432 for the puff pastry. In Frank Chlumsky's Introduction to Professional Cooking, 15 entry-level students clustered in the fifth-floor auditorium and demo kitchen as he gave a brisk rundown of the differences in standard menu structures, pricing, and terminology. Two floors below, in the school's dining room kitchen, Ambarish Lulay directed his soon-to-graduate students in the production of a completely new menu for the school's Zagat-rated restaurant. Watching the sober, white-jacketed chefs in training as they navigated the hustle and bustle of the gleaming new kitchen, it was hard to believe that only a few years ago Kendall was in serious trouble. Kendall was founded in Evanston in 1934 as a liberal arts college. The culinary school wasn't added until 1985, but it soon proved to be the program that paid the bills. By 2002 more than half its students were in the culinary program, which had a first-class rep and a roster of alumni that included dozens of local notables, from “Hot Doug” Sohn to fine-dining names like Eric Aubriot and Shawn McClain. But the college was suffering an identity crisis. “When I started going there as a student it was still very much a liberal arts col-

lege, with a culinary component,” says food writer and culinary historian Joan Reardon, who took classes there in 1989 and served on its board in the late 90s. “But during the years I was on the board it was really a transitional period. There was this tug-of-war over whether it would continue as a four-year liberal arts college and rein in culinary a bit or go full-time into culinary school.” By 2002 the physical facility was deteriorating—the kitchens were crowded and sweltering, the equipment was showing its age, and Evanston's restrictive city bureaucracy made growth difficult. Reardon says the budget was deep in the red and a series of leadership upheavals—three presidents in the previous four years—had the board doing little besides convening search committees. Few members thought Kendall could invest any more in the culinary program, but they also believed that if it didn't the entire college was doomed. That fall after two years under interim leadership, the school hired its current president, Howard Tullman. An attorney, entrepreneur, and turnaround artist who freely admits he doesn't know a damn thing about cooking, Tullman had most recently been the CEO of a digital strategy and Internet design firm called Xceed; before that he'd run Tunes.com, an online multimedia site sold to eMusic.com in 2000 for around \$170 million. Outside the business world he's probably best known as an avid art collector who's donated work from his extensive

contemporary collection to Northwestern's Block Museum and the Milwaukee Museum of Art. In business and in life Tullman is a notorious detail hound, with so many fingers in so many pots it's hard to keep track of them all. He's been a lawyer and a horse breeder. He's produced a Broadway musical and written a (still unsold) screenplay. He's famous for 3 AM e-mails and a blunt, often profane management style. He's run 12 marathons and maintains an exhaustive Web site (tullman.com) chronicling his various other activities and enthusiasms. It includes an archive of his art holdings, a five-page resumé, articles on his business dealings, pictures of his large collection of Pez dispensers, an alphabetically organized section of sayings titled “Words of Wisdom,” the syllabus for an entrepreneurship class he teaches at Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management, photos of himself and his wife, Judy, at the Clinton White House, and the text of the toast he gave at his daughter Jamie's wedding. Other than the Kellogg class, Tullman had no experience in education before he came to Kendall. As he's fond of saying, he was brought to Kendall “to save it, sell it, or shut it down,” which is above all a business challenge. “The school had a great culinary school and a great reputation,” he says, “and it was kind of trapped inside the body of this giant, unwieldy, unworkable institution that was trying to do a lot of different

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The Man in the Mercedes

Jerry Kleiner’s specialty is charging into industrial neighborhoods with flashy concept restaurants. But his latest challenge is a little different: notoriously flash-resistant Hyde Park.

By Nicholas Day

Jerry Kleiner is standing inside Loncar Liquors, an old-man bar on the corner of Brandon and 92nd Street. He motions at the chicken in the deep fryer behind the bar. “They use pure lard,” he says approvingly. The employees at the counter, a few of whom look like they’ve been around since the bar opened in 1924, have stopped working to stare at Kleiner. He’s wearing a red wind-breaker over a blue Puma sweatshirt, brown Nike warm-up pants, and white wing tips. His steel blue architect glasses slope down his nose. “I’m just showing my friend this place,” Kleiner says, waving at his surroundings. The staff slowly nods.

Kleiner’s made a career of turning up in unlikely places. Fifteen years ago his restaurant Vivo opened on a raw stretch of West Randolph in the meat-packing district. Dozens of restaurants followed, including the typically theatrical Kleiner productions Red Light and Marché. At the end of the 90s he led a similar parade into the South Loop, opening Gioco, then Opera, on South Wabash. Now Kleiner’s moving farther south. This June he plans to open a 160-seat “eclectic American” restaurant in a former Women’s Workout World off Harper and 52nd Street in Hyde Park. In the other half of the nondescript building, owned by the University of Chicago, is the generic new incarnation of the Checkerboard Lounge blues club.

It’s as unlikely a location for a flashy restaurateur as West Randolph once was. And though Kleiner claims to love the neighborhood, he also talks about himself as its savior: “Somebody like me needs to set the bar for the community. Somebody needs to take a shot at it.” The contradiction—I love you, you’re perfect,

now change—is essential to understanding Jerry Kleiner. He genuinely loves the untrendy, but his business is capitalizing on the implicit trendiness of it. He seeks out neighborhood joints for their authenticity, but his restaurants have been successful because they’re not part of any neighborhood—they’re an escape from what’s outside. At Marché the diner enters through a ceiling-high velvet curtain, like an actor going onstage.

Kleiner, who’s 50, is athletic and radiates a breezy confidence. You’d never know that 20 years ago his entrepreneurial career started with a stumble when a condo development of his collapsed and a nightclub he co-owned, Cairo, had to be sold off at a loss. But shortly after that Kleiner formed a partnership with lawyer Howard Davis and stockbroker Dan Krasny and began his game of hopscotch down Randolph Street. Eventually it was the partnership that missed: Krasny, who’d run Vivo, sued Davis and Kleiner in 1999 alleging that they’d overcharged for services (an eventual settlement gave Krasny control of the restaurant in exchange for his shares in others). Then in 2003 Davis and Kleiner broke off their partnership, and Davis sued. Kleiner dismisses the breakup as the result of “a different point of view.” (Davis didn’t return calls for comment.) They still own four restaurants together.

Judging from his current workload, Kleiner wasn’t hurt by the split. Carnivale, his six-month-old pan-Latino restaurant on Fulton, is his biggest operation yet—it seats 420, and the staff numbers 150. Last summer he opened the Victor Hotel, a sleek grown-up lounge, in the West Loop. And he’s scouting for locations in Garfield Park, Lawndale, and Gary,

Indiana, as well as on the south side.

“I’m an explorer of Chicago,” Kleiner says, sitting in Carnivale. The bar behind him is padded like a red leather banquette. “At the end of my day I like getting into my car and just driving neighborhoods, going to little places in the communities—little markets, little divey places that’ve been around 50 to 60 years. I go check out the fanciest restaurants, but I’m still a down-to-earth little grunge rat.” The grunge rat does most of his dive-to-dive driving these days in a black Mercedes convertible.

There are three things to know about riding around town with Kleiner. The first is that he takes a lot of calls. The second is that when he gets excited, which is frequently, he takes both hands off the steering wheel and revolves them around each other like a barrel rolling. The third is that the man knows the south side. He reels off exact addresses for obscure diners and pizzerias in Bridgeport and South Chicago. He knows so many restaurants that haven’t changed in half a century he could lead a culinary tour of the city circa JFK. On the other hand, he’s all over every bit of construction and renovation.

“Look at this, look at this,” he says, driving along a stretch of Cottage Grove. “These are single-family homes starting at \$800,000. Who the fuck’s buying these? Look at those town houses. Every one of these is being rehabbed. Every one. It’s unbelievable.” It irritates him that no one he knows ventures down here. “They think those neighborhoods are bad ghetto-infested communities that are just rough and unsafe. I want to change all that.”

Infamously fine-dining poor, Hyde
KLEINER continued on page 12

region,” says marketing director Erin Lough. “When someone hires one of our graduates they know they’re proficient at Cordon Bleu standards.”

WHAT THE STUDENTS SAY Students have high praise for the “fantastic, well-trained and approachable” faculty, but some complain about crowded entry-level classes and other administrative issues.

FAMOUS ALUMS Ron Bilaro, assistant to Oprah’s chef Art Smith; Denise Norton, owner of Flavour Cooking School in Forest Park; Marilyn Pocius, author of *The Cook’s Guide to Chicago*

WHAT’S THE DAMAGE? \$39,950 total (culinary), \$38,500 (baking and pastry); almost all students receive some form of financial aid.

THE FRENCH PASTRY SCHOOL
226 W. Jackson | 312-726-2419 | frenchpastryschoo.com

DEGREES Certificate of completion

IN BRIEF In 1995 veteran French chefs Jacquy Pfeiffer and Sebastien Cannone combined their experience and their recipes to open this school, affiliated with the City Colleges of Chicago. They’ve since added instructors (three currently) to teach an intensive six-month course in which students learn the fine points of French pastry and candy making, from basic baguettes and croissants to sophisticated showpieces.

TEACHING RESTAURANT None

WHAT THE SCHOOL SAYS “We are the only school in the nation that is solely devoted to pastry,” says marketing manager Anne Kauffmann.

WHAT THE STUDENTS SAY “It’s the passion of the chefs—they definitely go above and beyond,” says Courtney Dohman. “The knowledge is unbelievable and the stories they tell are amazing. . . . I remember chef John Kraus telling us at the beginning this is going to be a shock for people who’ve always gotten As, and I got a B in the class. Normally I would have been mortified, but I was so proud because of the level of excellence that they want from you.”

FAMOUS ALUMS Sarah Levy, owner of Sarah’s Pastries & Candies; Michelle Garcia, owner of Bleeding Heart Bakery

WHAT’S THE DAMAGE? \$17,500, increasing to \$19,500 next year; financial aid and scholarships are available.

ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF ART—CHICAGO
180 N. Wabash | 312-280-3500 or 800-351-3450 | ilic.artinstitutes.edu

DEGREES AAS in culinary arts and Bachelor’s in Applied Science in culinary management; certificate in baking and pastry

IN BRIEF The local outpost of the Art Institutes opened its culinary school here
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Jerry Kleiner

JIM NEWBERRY

Restaurants Special

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things and doing most of them fairly poorly. My interest was in whether you could extract what was valuable, in terms of what the school did well, and focus on those things. Then maybe you could save it.”

Tullman got approval from the board to fix the problem by any means necessary. Within two weeks he’d drawn up a 15-page memo outlining his priorities and the steps he was going to take to accomplish them. He added several former business associates to the administrative roster, including a new dean of students. He sat the faculty and staff down and explained just how strapped the college was for cash—at least a million in the hole and likely to close in as little as 90 days. “Educating the faculty about the financial situation was very critical so they understood both the severity and the urgency of things,” he says. “I don’t know if they did. I don’t know if they understood that they were quite close to being out of a job.”

The biggest change was yet to come. In May 2003 Tullman happened to drive by the shuttered Sara Lee R & D building on Halsted just north of Chicago Avenue. Within days he’d met with the owner of the Goose Island property and pitched its purchase—in his words, “the opportunity of a lifetime”—to the board. Over the next three weeks he brokered deals with Sara Lee and the owners of the six acres the facility sat on, got approval from the board, the city, and the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools to move the school, sold the Evanston campus for \$10 million, and raised another \$50 million to finance the renovation and move. Kendall’s Riverworks campus was open for business by January 2005.

“It was wild,” says culinary school dean Christopher Koetke of the intervening year. “There was all the euphoria of a start-up company—the long days, the feeling of going somewhere you’d never been before. In any sort of business planning you always want to sort of look backward and try and understand things to forecast. But we changed so many things that all our forecasting



Clockwise from top left: Howard Tullman, the new Kendall campus, Christopher Koetke, Elaine Sikorski

models went out the window.” Tullman’s turbocharged style didn’t sit well with everyone. Mike Artlip, the culinary school’s associate’s degree program chair, is a 29-year Kendall vet. In his role as chair of the faculty senate he acted as a buffer between the new president and the faculty and remem-

bers being in Tullman’s office on an almost daily basis. “He was very abrupt, and he probably could have been more diplomatic, but he didn’t feel the need to be. He bent a few egos, but he felt like he had a job to get done.” Koetke remembers spending an inordinate amount of energy

putting out fires. “There were rumors,” he says. “People were obviously worried and scared about ‘What all does this mean for me personally?’” He pauses. “The culinary world is sort of a special world. And culinary people do well with other culinary people. The fear is if you bring in

someone who doesn’t understand the culinary piece, you know, they get a little worried—like he’s not going to understand what we’re all about. Maybe he’s not going to understand what we need to do in order to teach well.” “You can’t afford to provide a good education if you’re not running a sensible economic institution,” says Tullman. “I think a lot of them thought I wouldn’t appreciate what went into teaching or how much of an art it was as opposed to a science.”

By the time the new campus opened the curriculum had also been revamped. Gone were things like athletics and Web-development classes. In their place were comprehensive bachelor’s programs in culinary arts, hospitality management, and early childhood education, another Kendall staple, and associate’s degree options in culinary and baking and pastry. (A business program was added to the mix this year.) Some students and staff lamented the loss of the cozy atmosphere and green space of the Evanston campus, but most saw the improvements as huge. “It’s like going from driving a Hyundai to driving a Cadillac,” says baking and pastry instructor Mark Kwasigroch. “Everything is state-of-the-art.”

The new teaching kitchens were outfitted with industry innovations like programmable ovens and rolling blast chillers, which are essentially reverse convection ovens that rapidly cool food by blowing cold air around at high speeds—important, says Koetke, given ever-more-stringent FDA regulations. Two demo kitchens double as TV studios used to produce both in-house teaching videos and instructional DVDs for various clients. The wine classroom is outfitted with a wall of one-way glass for use in focus groups. Two baking and pastry kitchens feature industrial-strength mixers, dough cutters, and steam-injected ovens. The sugar and chocolate kitchen has cool granite countertops and ice cream machines. In the third-floor garde-manger kitchen—dedicated to the creation of cold items like patés, terrines, and

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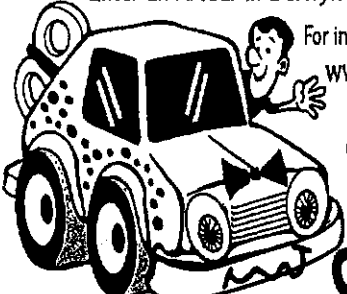
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