



## University Center offers new program to instill teamwork

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Just about everyone who has worked in an office has gone through some sort of company-wide training session. Topics often cover a variety of issues such as sexual harassment, workplace diversity and, that age-old chestnut, team building.

Companies spend thousands of dollars a year to encourage employees to work together. Trained facilitators will pair up employees and instruct them to fall backward into the out-stretched arms of their colleagues. Then there's the more elaborate and nerve-wracking ropes course.

The folks at the University Center of Lake County have created something less strenuous, and a lot more fun, to bring employees together. It involves cooking.

Kimberly Kreml, conference services and facility manager at University Center, said staff members got the idea about a year ago when "a large pharmaceutical firm in Lake County" approached them, wanting a different teamwork program. With the help of Mike Shoemaker, owner and operator of Noteable Event Productions who provides catering for the facility, the center came up with "Iron Chef."

On June 8, about 16 Snap-on Tool mid-level managers from across the country were treated to this elaborate cooking demonstration. Unlike the Food Network program, there is no real competition and no secret ingredient.

Les Perry, of Howell, Mich., is a manager of field training for Snap-on and put together a two-week training program at the University Center. The managers spend six days in class for the two weeks, taking tours of the Snap-on Corporate Office in Kenosha, Wis., the Customer Service Center in Crystal Lake and the company's Credit Office in Libertyville.

Shoemaker and two sous chefs showed volunteers how to cook Steak Diane and chicken picatta with several sides. As the grand finale, the men learned how to make Bananas Foster.

"I read in a magazine that Bananas Foster is it," Shoemaker told the men. "It's romantic. It beats flowers, candy – all of it."

The men enjoyed New England Crab Cakes and a tool man's wedge salad, as well as many pitchers of beer. They donned paper chef's hats and aprons. A couple of the volunteers wrote on their hats with a marker. One went by the moniker of "Chef Boyardee" and another was "Chef Snappy."

Whether the men cooked or not, they all piled into the facility's industrial kitchen. Most were led in by the smell of grilled meats and vegetables. Flames licked the pans, and many of the men started to look nervous.

"A lot of these guys don't cook," Perry said. "Fires at home are usually [a] bad [thing]."

Thirty-year-old Joel Yeates, of Indianapolis, is married and has one child. He admits he doesn't cook when he's at home.

"This is pretty cool," Yeates said. "It's a nice place."

He said he's been with Snap-on for three and a half years and "everything they put on is first class."

Some of the men making the chicken picatta were apprehensive about one of the dish's main ingredients – capers.

"What are capers?" several volunteers asked. "I've never seen those before."

After they tasted the dish, most were OK with them.

Perry said this is the second time Snap-on has participated in Iron Chef, and the last group really enjoyed it. The managers started their training with a week in Dallas, and after this session, they will go home for a week or so and then head to Dallas again for two more weeks.

"It's pretty intensive training," Perry said.

Kreml said one of the best things about Iron Chef is that food and recipes can be tailored to the interests of the group and its size. She said they charge about \$100 a person, which covers the cost of food, along with the chefs' time.

After the whole thing was through, Shoemaker looked pretty tired, but he had fun.

"Oh, this is a blast," he said.

### **Ready to 'team' up?**

For more information on the Iron Chef teamwork program, contact Kimberly Kreml, conference services and facility manager at the University Center, at (847) 665-4010.