

## Cooking on the Farm

By Rylan Capper

I consider myself a pretty good cook. Like many of us, I learned from standing at my mother's side in the kitchen. I started by licking cookie dough covered beaters and worked through stages of mixing, stirring, and chopping, until finally, I became an independent cook. Cooking has now become my favorite hobby, followed closely by eating; however, through all of this comes the anxiety of consistently performing the impossible task of making dinner seven times a week. It takes half a day to cook a pot roast. A taco bar can create a mess of dishes, and even a simple lasagna can be more headache than it's worth. So what's the solution? Or is this just the monotony of adulthood?

I recently attended the "Quick Dinner Solutions" class at Salomon Farm Park in an attempt to break through the wall of intimidation behind dinner. I was immediately greeted by Chef Patrick Whetstone within my first few steps inside. He sparked conversation with me and tried to get a feel for the skill I was bringing to his class. As the rest of the students trickled in, he made sure to include them in the conversation. In no time, I had made six new friends. I was impressed not only by how intimate the setting was, but also by how diverse the group was. There was a mother and son duo looking for some bonding time, a young married couple in search of dinner that doesn't hail from a box, and a few people looking to spend some time at the farm. Chef Whetstone gathered us around the island and explained the menu for the night: simple, but delicious pasta, cauliflower stir-fry, and 15-minute risotto. He began with the pasta while we all closely observed, pens in hand. He exudes a certain level of skill and confidence, and because of this, he is an ever-flowing font of tips and facts. The fragrance of fresh veggies and spiced sausage filled the kitchen as we continued to meticulously scribble about the rendering of fat and proper "mise en place." Before plating, he allowed us to sample and put forward our suggestions. We tweaked it to our liking and finally, we ate. Several moments of blissful silence followed before we began course two: cauliflower stir-fry. A collective "duh" moment was shared as we

watched Chef Whetstone break down the vegetables in an amazingly simple and quick way. After several show-stopping pan flips and a few tastings, we were presented with beautiful plates of high-end stir-fry. He had managed to take a platter of everyday, banal ingredients and create a flavorful and healthy dish. Now, all we waited for was the chicken and risotto. Without breaking conversation, he carefully began searing the chicken and cooking the rice, and within 20 minutes, we all had a plate of Ritz-Carlton worthy food.

I loved Chef Whetstone's class and I plan on seeking out his other courses in the future, as well as several other courses at Salomon Farm Park. He showed us that food relies heavily on personal taste and that "fancy" food doesn't always stem from "fancy" ingredients. He challenged us not to blindly follow recipes, but to put our skills to work and create dishes we love from what we already have. Not only did I leave this class with a list of tips to better my cooking, I also gained an invaluable change of perspective on cooking. After this class, the idea of dinner changed from a looming chore to something I look forward to planning... and eating!

Rylan is a local student in his senior year at Leo High School and is currently working as an intern at Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation. He plans to study communications and fine arts at IUPUI in Indianapolis. In addition to fine arts, Rylan also holds a deep passion for food and culture, which he attributes to his mother.