



Small Business Spotlight

Sedona Culinary Institute trains cooks for every corner

By Jessica MacLean for the City of Sedona



Chef Robert Barr, culinary and hospitality director and instructor (left), pictured with Ernst Springhorn, instructor, in one of the teaching kitchens at Yavapai College Sedona Center.

SEDONA, Ariz. – “It was the city and the people of Sedona that really drove this program for us. At one time, they wanted four kitchens, we have two. It would have taken a good portion of this building. [The school] does help in the community. We’re very happy to be here,” says Chef Robert Barr, culinary and hospitality director of the **Sedona Culinary Institute** at Yavapai College.

When Chef Barr was in high school, he was one of only six other students bussed to Boys Town in Nebraska for three hours of culinary arts training each morning.

“After 30 plus years, I teach two of the largest high school programs, both morning and afternoon classes, Monday through Thursday. So, it’s full circle for me,” says Chef Barr.

Prior to teaching at the Yavapai College Sedona Center, the chef opened two other culinary schools, two restaurants, and even trained in France. Now he’s helping others earn their Culinary Arts Fundamentals Certificate, a 16-credit hour program in west Sedona.

“75 percent are high school students getting their certificate. My biggest class was from the Sedona high school,” says Chef Barr.

High school juniors and seniors in the program earn dual enrollment college credits that also transfer to Northern Arizona University, one of the top hospitality schools in the country.

“They do a couple days of lecture and a couple days of lab for 16 weeks. After winter break, we do it again for 16 weeks in the spring. Then they graduate. We had over 30 graduates in 2019 and a waiting list for 2020.

Each class has grown, almost doubled in size every year,” Chef Barr elaborates.

Since students can receive certificates about the same time as their high school diploma, trade school doesn’t have to wait.

“70 percent of our high school students also passed the National Restaurant Association’s ServSafe Manager certificate exam. The health department says if you have 10 or more employees in your business, you need to have somebody on staff with that certification the entire time the place is open. A couple students got instant pay increases because they were the only ones on property with the certificate,” Chef Barr explains. “Now restaurant chefs, owners, and managers all



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need to have ServSafe certificates. We teach the class; I’m a certified instructor and proctor of the test. This is a bonus to their culinary arts certificate.”

Meeting needs in the workforce, the Sedona Culinary Institute is creating skilled employees for local job openings. Graduates are filtered to Sedona and other regional resorts, restaurants, bistros, cafes, catering, and pizza joints, attempting to address the city’s demand and fill a workforce gap.

Former students hold sous chef and cook positions at Sedona’s finest establishments like Enchantment, L’Auberge de Sedona, and Mariposa.

Sedona’s plethora of fine food establishments illustrate the impact of tourism on a small, yet

beautiful city. Demand for certified and skilled workers is incredibly high with the year-round population of a rural region staffing so many restaurants.

“We have a few students who are working with remarkable pastry chefs at Layla’s Bakery-Café,” says Chef Barr. “Sedona is the type of place that needs this program.”

Most students are already working in the industry when starting classes, but accreditations help them advance while helping their employer gain talent with the certifications, skills, and knowledge necessary for operation.

“Enchantment pays for their school. They house them and pay them well. And so, these

“Our Advisory Board, made up of local and regional industry professionals, comes together twice per year to analyze the program, curriculum, and outlines to make sure we’re doing exactly what the community wants and needs for our students, teaching them the things they need, making sure they have the equipment necessary for them to be able to learn the things that are happening out there,” explains Chef Barr. “To have these professionals in the workforce advising us on what direction we need to go with our students is invaluable.”

The culinary institute is taking over the small café at the Sedona Center, where students will be able to bake and sell their products, learn how to be a barista, and learn about working the front of the house. Since culinary arts students have also catered events, mostly at the Sedona Center, the center may even start putting on weddings with help from the program.

“We’re in our infant stage; we’ve had two graduating classes; 2020 will be our third graduating class.” Nearly doubling the number of students in each graduating class year after year, Chef Barr says, “we’re helping to meet the demand that is necessary for Northern Arizona.”

The Sedona Economic Development Department helps businesses create and keep jobs and opportunities in our community. For information on revolving loans, business education, and other business support resources, contact Sedona Economic Development Director Molly Spangler at mbspangler@sedonaaz.gov.

good cooks stick around,” says Chef Barr. “That’s the huge thing about this area—especially Sedona and Oak Creek—is that these businesses understand it’s necessary to have an educated individual in the back of the house. Not just somebody who’s cooking, but really invest in who they are so they have all the understandings, the basic knowledge of cooking, all the aspects, including baking.”

The culinary arts certification at the Yavapai College Sedona Center is hands-on.

Chef Barr says it is, “a place to make mistakes and learn the solutions. We allow them to make the mistakes that are necessary for them to be a success.”

In the future, an associate degree combining hospitality and culinary may be available.



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