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TC3 cooks up new venture: Farm-to-Bistro



Denis Boucher, director of the TC3 culinary center named Coltivare, stands in the newly opened bistro in downtown Ithaca.

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THE LIST:

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Ranked by No. of CNY Employees

| Rank | Firm | Employees |
|------|--------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Manpower | 1,000 |
| 2 | Temp Staffing | 800 |
| 3 | Staffing Solutions | 600 |
| 4 | Staffing Services | 500 |
| 5 | Staffing Solutions | 400 |
| 6 | Staffing Solutions | 300 |
| 7 | Staffing Solutions | 200 |
| 8 | Staffing Solutions | 150 |
| 9 | Staffing Solutions | 100 |
| 10 | Staffing Solutions | 50 |

EMPLOYEE-PLACEMENT & STAFFING FIRMS 7B

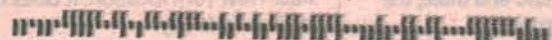


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SMALL PLATES TO BECOME ASTER PANTRY & PARLOR

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TC3 cooks up new venture: Farm-to-Bistro

BY NORMAN POLTENSON
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ITHACA/DRYDEN — “Coltivare” is the Italian word for cultivate. It’s also the name adopted by the bistro/restaurant that opened in December 2014 in downtown Ithaca featuring the growing “farm-to-table” trend of producing food locally.

Coltivare is just one part of an innovative concept recently developed by Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3) in Dryden. Dubbed “Farm-to-Bistro,” the pro-

gram is designed to give students hands-on experience in every aspect of the food-production system. In addition to the bistro, the program has an organic farm adjacent to campus, which produces fresh, local produce for the Coltivare restaurant, and integrates both the farm and bistro into four degree programs offered by TC3.

Curriculum

“Students can earn an A.A.S. degree in culinary arts, sustainable farming and food systems, wine marketing, and hotel and restaurant management (HRMG),” says Susan Stafford, TC3’s chair of culinary arts and hotel and restaurant management. “Enrollment this past year in HRMG was between 50 and 60 students with another 60 in culinary arts. We enjoy a mix of traditional and non-traditional students attracted by growing industries in food service, travel and tourism, and meetings/conventions. There are very few community colleges in the country that have our comprehensive, global program, with an option of spending 10 weeks in Italy. We also see students taking advantage of the multiple courses the college offers with some coming back for second degrees. The HRMG and culinary-



Todd McLane, the director of the TC3 Farm, stands in one of four structures built to grow vegetables year-round. The farm is part of the sustainable-farming program that offers an A.A.S. degree.

arts curricula are comprehensive and include everything from food-preparation/service, sanitation, room-management, hospitality law, marketing, and cost-control to food preparation and systems, restaurant operations, and the basics of running a business. The college also has an exemption from New York State, which allows underage students to taste adult beverages as part of their course work. That helps to make the program sexy for our traditional students (those who typically go on to a four-year college).”

Brandon Seager, chair of the wine-marketing program at TC3, just completed the first year of his new degree program. “We had 20 students in the wine-marketing class, of whom 75 percent were non-traditional students,” he says. “The non-traditional students are focused on employment immediately after graduation. What they are pleasantly surprised to learn is the variety of meaningful jobs in areas as diverse as winery management, sales and distribution, corporate marketing, hospitality management on cruise ships and in casinos, and even writing. In addition to the A.A.S. degree, this program also offers a 25-credit certificate in wine marketing, some of which is offered online. The degree program includes an introduction to the hospitality industry, a survey of wine and alcoholic beverages, grape-growing and the wine business, wine and food pairing, marketing and merchandising, accounting, and hospitality law. The curriculum also includes exposure to beverages other than wine, such as beers and ciders. An important part of the four degree programs is the emphasis on internships, which not only offer valuable experience but also lead to job placement after graduation.”

TC3 Farm

Todd McLane, director of the TC3 Farm, joined the community college in February 2014 and launched the sustainable-farming course in September. “The farm (TC3 Farm, LLC) is located on the north edge of the campus and includes about 50 acres we can use,” says McLane. “Currently, we

have about four acres in production for growing vegetables year-round, utilizing a greenhouse and three hoop houses, which comprise about 7,000 [square] feet. There is also a heated 7,000-foot barn, which houses a classroom and offices. Our plans include adding an orchard ... The barn already has stalls to keep farm animals. All of our produce is grown using organic practices, and the farm is in the process of moving off the [electric] grid by relying only on solar, wind, and geothermal energy.”

The curriculum is comprehensive. “We explore the history of agriculture; the growth of the current global, industrial food system; a movement toward a sustainable and resilient food supply; soil science and fertility management; and pest management. All students are required to take a summer session that’s all about getting down and dirty,” says McLane.

“The farm is set up as an independent business which is owned by the [TC3] Foundation,” the farm director adds. “The goal is to be self-sufficient and to operate financially without depending on support from TC3. In year one, the program hosted 15 students. While their backgrounds were diverse, they all seemed to share a passion for local food and sustainable agriculture ... The farm works closely with Coltivare to determine what to plant, but we also sell our produce to other customers, such as the TC3 cafeteria and CSA (community-supported agriculture) program ... The farm is a learning place that should serve everybody on campus. It’s open to all classes to utilize, whether biology, ecology, or even photography.”

Coltivare

“The Coltivare Culinary Center supports the educational mission of farm-to-bistro,” affirms Denis Boucher, director of the center (restaurant). “This restaurant provides a real-world experience for the students, as well as an event space and a tasting room. The students prepare fresh, hand-crafted foods, while learning all aspects of a restau-



Carl Haynes, president of TC3, explains the challenges he faced in creating the new Farm-to-Bistro program at the college.

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COLTIVARE: According to Haynes, the idea of creating farm-to-bistro was serendipitous

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rant enterprise: meal planning and preparation, professional-service techniques, and food and wine pairing. The facility has state-of-the-art teaching labs and a cellar stocked with a selection of international wines. The bistro also features 30 Finger Lakes wines by the glass and 16 local beers on tap. In the summer, we buy 90 percent of our food locally and in the winter about 50 percent. Coltivare only serves foods that are fresh, local, and hand-crafted: You won't find anything that is processed. Local products, global flavors — that's our theme."

While the goal is to educate students, Coltivare, like the farm, is run as a business and expected to generate a surplus, which goes back to the TC3 Foundation. "The restaurant is incorporated as TC3 Bistro, LLC (d/b/a Coltivare)," emphasizes Boucher, "and is owned by the foundation. We lease 17,300 square feet here from Bloomfield/Schon + Partners, developers from Cincinnati who have been active in Ithaca since 2008. The bookkeeping is a little tricky since 70 percent of the revenue and expenses are allocated to education while the remainder is allocated to the business side."

Ramsgard Architectural Design, P.C. of Skaneateles designed the restaurant, and Turnbull-Wahlert Construction, Inc. of Cincinnati completed the build-out.

Coltivare retained a national consultant to help develop the bistro concept. "Our original idea was to create a Northern Italian menu," recalls Boucher, "but modified it to an 'American' cuisine that is really international. Initially, we also targeted area residents who were 25 to 40 years old as our primary audience, but adjusted that after the restaurant opened. Our focus now is on those who are in the 30 to 60 [age range]. The Coltivare concept also treats the staff in the European tradition by paying our employees a comparatively high wage and offering benefits, including health care, a 401(k) retirement package, vacation, and sick time. The idea is that working at the restaurant is a career, not just a job. Our policy has attracted an excellent staff with low turnover, but it also presents us with a pricing challenge."

Boucher says his first year's revenue budget is about \$2 million. The Coltivare staff is comprised of 60 employees, or 43 full-time equivalents.

Funding

Carl E. Haynes, president of Tompkins Cortland Community College, says funding the project was a challenge. "We needed to raise \$7 million: approximately \$2 million for the farm and \$5 million for the culinary center. The first step was to acquire 67 acres of land that we could add to 25 acres previously acquired by the foundation. The foundation bought the 67-acre property for \$270,000. Next, TC3 applied for a \$1.3 million grant through the Southern Tier Regional Economic Development Council. We understood that possible funding would be limited to \$1.3 million and applied for Empire State Development funds and Market New York tourism-development grant funds, hoping that between them we

would realize the amount requested. We were delighted when we not only were awarded a \$1.3 million grant from Market New York, but even more delighted and surprised when we received an additional grant of \$1 million from Empire State Development."

With \$2.3 million promised from the state, Haynes sought out the college's most generous donor. "Arthur Kuckes is the owner of Vector Magnetics and an Ithaca resident who has donated \$11.5 million to the college to fund the Pathway's Scholarship Program," Haynes says. "His scholarships offer up to \$7,000 to non-traditional students to encourage them to complete their education in order to be eligible for better career opportunities. In 2013, I asked Arthur to consider contributing to the proposed Farm-to-Bistro concept. He responded with a check for \$2 million. Now that I had \$4.3 million, I went to three bankers on our foundation board of directors and convinced them to loan the foundation the difference and to provide a bridge loan until New York State reimburses us from the allocated grant money."

Serendipity

According to Haynes, the idea of creating farm-to-bistro was serendipitous. "In the summer of 2011, I was invited to a dinner that was the culmination of a course entitled 'sustainable farming and local food systems.' The course was offered by TC3 in collaboration with the Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming and hosted by the West Haven Farm. One of the presenters was Todd McLane, who was then working at West Haven, an organic farm in Ithaca. During informal conversations, someone asked the question: Why not create an entire program that teaches not just sustainable farming but also follows the culinary process to the table? A short time later, I traveled to Kirkwood Community College (in Iowa) to attend a conference. The college had just built a hotel on campus, which also included a culinary center. Kirkwood had developed a culinary program built around the restaurant."

The two events propelled Haynes to consider establishing an A.A.S. degree program at TC3. There was no consideration of building a hotel on campus, but he next asked the faculty to develop the curricula. The TC3 Foundation's purchase of the 67 acres made the farm site an easy choice, but it took some time to identify the ideal location for the restaurant and to raise money to support the concept. In 2012, Haynes ordered a feasibility study for Coltivare. The idea that the farm and restaurant would be financially self-sustaining was determined at the outset.

Haynes also reached out to key industry leaders to be strategic partners. "While applying for the [state] grant, I began looking not just for donors but also for partners who could help us develop the program," recalls the TC3 president. "The executive chef at the Ithaca Wegmans [supermarket]



Stafford



Seager

was a member of the college's advisory board. We asked for the company's help, especially since Danny Wegman had established an organic farm on Canandaigua Lake to teach area farmers how to transition to organic farming. TC3 even mod-

eled [its] farm after Wegmans' organic farm. The partnership has led to a generous donation from the supermarket chain as well as internships and jobs at Wegmans in areas such as food distribution and wine marketing."

Industry forecast

The farm-to-bistro program came on line just as economists are forecasting a rosy food industry. Restaurant industry sales are expected to hit record levels in 2015, according to the National Restaurant Association, topping \$709 billion. The industry employs 14 million people in 1 million locations, serving as the nation's second-largest, private-sector employer. The association projects that restaurants will add another 1.7 million employees in the next decade. It also notes that customers are increasingly interested in locally sourced food items and healthful menu options. IBIS, an industry research firm, also notes that tourism in the U.S. is "... [t]aking off, after the turbulent recession." The industry, which employs approximately 6 million people and generates sales of \$1 trillion, has enjoyed, on average, 4.3 percent annual growth over the past five years. The food industry has also grown at an average 3 percent annual rate since 2000. The organic food market, on the other hand, has grown by 14 percent annually during the same period and now tops \$30 billion in annual U.S. sales.

Playmakers

Stafford was raised on a 200-acre dairy farm in Central New York. A graduate of Niagara University's Hospitality Program, she has spent 40 years in the industry, including about five years with Conde Nast Publications in the London office and 15 years as a VP for the hotel-recruitment division of Hospitality International. Prior to those positions, Stafford worked in operations and sales with Interstate Hotels (Marriott), Holiday Inn, and Hilton and had conference-services experience with Travel Trade Publications and Bonnie Walsh Associates. She joined TC3 in 2003 and became the chair of the program in 2010. As a department chair, she teaches hospitality-management, develops curriculum, garners regional and global educational partnerships, and provides industry outreach.

Seager began his college education in mechanical engineering, before the wine bug bit him. He earned a graduate degree at Cornell University in enology and viticulture. After graduating, he worked as a "cellar rat" at a Finger Lakes winery before advancing to cellar master, assistant winemaker, and winemaker. Seager joined TC3 in the fall of 2013.

McLane hails from central New Jersey

and graduated from SUNY Albany with a bachelor's degree in psychology and sociology. Smitten by the concept of organic farming, he worked as the manager at West Haven Farm from 2005 until February 2014, at which time he joined TC3. He has also served as a farmer-educator at the Groundswell Center for Local Food and Farming since 2009.

Boucher grew up in Sanford, Maine and developed his appreciation for cooking from his mother. He worked in a restaurant while in high school and attended the Culinary Institute of America. After that, Boucher worked the next 15 years as a chef in Atlanta, Colorado, and Miami. His career then took him to the South Pole as the chef for two research centers. He continued his education at Florida International University in Miami and accepted the position of food-and-beverage manager at the Biltmore Hotel. Subsequently, Boucher's career included owning a restaurant and teaching at the New England Culinary Institute. He started in his current position in April 2014.

Haynes earned his bachelor's degree in business from the Rochester Institute of Technology, a master of science and an MBA from Syracuse University, and a Ph.D. from Cornell University. He joined TC3 in 1969 as a member of the business faculty. Haynes subsequently held positions at TC3 as the director of the development center for business, a division head, and dean of administration. He was named interim president in 1994 and appointed as the college's third president in 1995. He currently serves on several area boards, including Tompkins County Area Development Corp., Cayuga Cortland Workforce Investment Board, and the Tompkins County Workforce Investment Board.

Ramping up

The farm-to-bistro concept has ramped up quickly. "In 2012, this department had one employee — yours truly," quips Stafford. The college has just hired a full-time faculty member for the culinary-arts program who will begin in the fall of 2015.

"Today, there are approximately 70 who are part of a unique program that is very popular with our students. (The TC3 Foundation board of directors formed two corporations: TC3 Farm, LLC and TC3 Bistro.) Currently, we are attracting mostly local enrollees, but our goal is to reach out geographically to a broader audience," Stafford says. "Our challenge is to market the program aggressively both to traditional and non-traditional students. We have a lot to sell — In addition to diverse yet integrated curricula, we offer national and global industry relationships. That really sets us apart, as does Coltivare with its state-of-the-art facility."

Farm-to-table, farm-to-bistro — whatever you call it — TC3 has cooked up an exciting venture that is grabbing the public's attention, not just for its academic program but also for its entrepreneurial concept. It is also enjoying fortuitous timing in riding a national wave of interest in fresh, handcrafted meals that are creative and healthful. ■