

Ready for the working world

Community Resources program readies disabled for culinary careers

Peeling and chopping vegetables, learning to mold a crab cake, checking the heat of the grill and then reaching over to stir the beginnings of a sauce for the Chicken Cacciatore — it's all part of the day's routine for chef/instructor Anthony Conio.

The Tottenville resident works with the 10 students currently enrolled in the work readiness program at Community Resources (CR), a not-for-profit agency serving the developmentally and learning disabled, in Travis.

"The first six months, it's a basic preparation program. They're taught all the sanitation and skill techniques I learned in culinary school," said Conio. A graduate of New York City Technical College's hospitality program in Brooklyn, he worked as a chef in several restaurants and hotels in the New York area before taking on the role of teacher. "Sometimes we'll make Pasta Fagioli or grilled chicken on Caesar Salad," said the chef, who grew up in Oakwood. "We make it all, and it's always fresh."

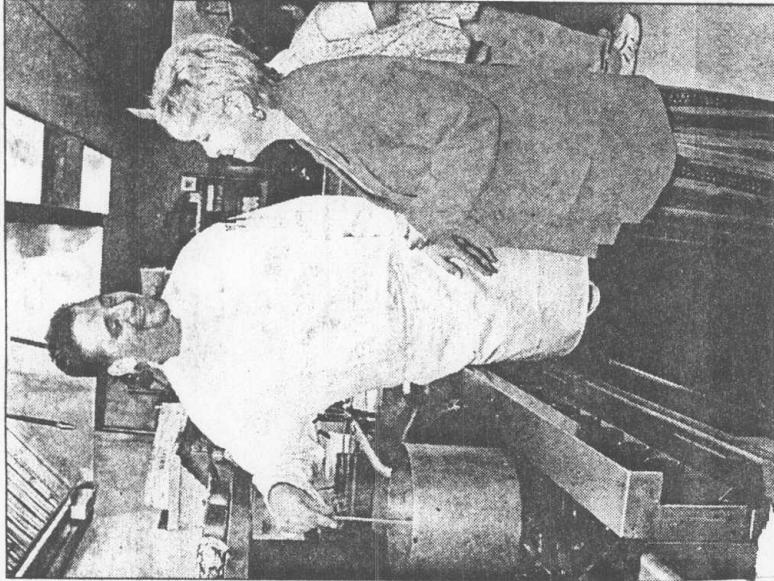
"They learn how to buy fresh vegetables, how to blanch and package foods for freezer storage, how to prepare fish, to grill and make sauces. We drill it, day after day, Monday through Thursday. Friday is our lecture day."



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By his side as the chef spoke was Christopher Fazio, the first student to enroll in the program and Conio's prized pupil. That day, the two had just finished making apple turnovers. "I like making desserts; they're fun to make," said Fazio, who admitted he likes the busy pace of the kitchen work. "There's always something to do; I like it here," said the trainee.

"He's really like my assistant," said Conio, proudly. As part of the program, Fazio is assembling a book of recipes based on the items prepared in the cafeteria. The chef plans to color code it, so the recipes will be more accessible.



At left, Anthony Conio is busy while talking with Marlene Ruggiero, director of program services for Community Resources. Below, Christopher Fazio serves Dana Magee, executive director, Barbara Mercado, associate executive director, and Marlene Ruggiero.