

City workers cook up healthy cuisine at HCC/MGM Culinary Arts Institute

HOLYOKE – Jim Crowley, an employee at Holyoke Gas & Electric, went back to school last week to learn how to grill salmon which he ate with fresh, locally grown produce.

"It's fantastic on a salad," said Crowley. "So when you're eating it, it doesn't feel like you're on a diet. You're just eating better food."

Crowley was one of 16 city employees and their spouses who took a two-day course and learned to prepare healthy meals at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute. After preparing them in the industrial sized kitchen, they sat down to

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COURTESY PHOTO

Enrique Melendez (left), a Holyoke Department of Public Works employee, and Jim Crowley, of Holyoke Gas & Electric, slice onions during a healthy cooking class at the HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute hosted by Training and Workforce Options.

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enjoy their cuisine for what was billed as "dinner by the canal."

Training and Workforce Options (TWO), a Holyoke Community College and Springfield Technical Community College partnership, hosted the healthy cooking class on July 10 and July 17.

Warren Leigh, chairman of the hospitality management and culinary arts programs at HCC, developed the two-part, hands-on class, which promotes health and wellness. Participants included Holyoke employees from a cross section of departments.

City employees who took the class focused on the Mediterranean diet, which is abundant in fruits, vegetables and olive oil. The class introduces participants to knife skills, food choices, portion control, gluten-free food and cooking styles (grilling, steaming, baking and roasting).

Participants cooked with produce that was grown locally and learned about sustainability, which is the production of food using farming techniques that protect the environment.

The city of Holyoke's Wellness Committee approached TWO about hosting healthy cooking classes that could be offered to city employees and spouses. The intent of the class was to introduce employees to better cooking methods and new foods. Cigna, the health insurer for the city of Holyoke, paid for the program.

The first cooking class offered up a menu that included fresh chickpea



COURTESY PHOTO

Warren Leigh, chairman of the hospitality management and culinary arts programs at HCC, chops some greens.

salad, scallops and salmon.

Participants in the July 17 class learned a variety of useful culinary techniques, from peeling and cutting onions and vine-ripe local tomatoes to mincing garlic and herb, poaching chicken breast and preparing lentil and ragout.

Melissa Melendez, who works for the Holyoke Retirement Board, admitted she's not a great cook, so she signed up for the class to learn some tips about healthy cooking.

"I was up for a new experience," she said.

Other participants said they were excited to see the new HCC MGM Culinary Arts Institute, which has five kitchens, separate lab stations and a bakery.

"I've been driving by it for quite some time," Crowley said. "It's just beautiful inside. It's a real gem for the area."