

A delicious degree



PHOTOS BY DANIELLE FROST / POST RECORD

Melissa Ayers of Camas measures the ingredients for frosting in the cake room at Clark College's baking program. Ayers is a first-year student who tried several different careers before finding her true passion.



At left, second-year student and Camas resident Jenny Mears supervises chocolate eclair making in the cake room and later puts the finishing touches on a chocolate mousse bombe, center. At right, a baking program student waits on customers in the retail store at Clark College.

By Danielle Frost
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Every day, students in Clark College's baking program create an assortment of tantalizing treats. The program, located at the main Vancouver campus, teaches students the fine art of creating baked goods, as well as what it takes to be successful working in a bakery or pastry shop, or in bakery management. Ian Titterton is the program manager. He's been with Clark College for five years. Before that, he spent time teaching at several private culinary schools. He said that the Clark program is unique in that it has a fully functioning retail shop on campus. "Because we can sell product, we can make large batches of it and have quality industrial sized equipment," he said. The most popular items at the retail store are doughnuts, Danish pastries and a dessert known as "mousse bombe." It is a chocolate lover's dream, with chocolate

mousse layered over chocolate cake, and covered in ganache, which is a rich mixture of chocolate and cream. Titterton said he gets positive feedback from potential employers in the Portland and Vancouver area about the Clark College students who intern or work at different businesses. "They like our students because they have a good work ethic and their level of expectation is less than those who attend traditional culinary schools," he said. "They know that they aren't going to walk in there and expect to be managers right off the bat because they have a degree." Students in the program range from right out of high school to retirees looking to try their hand at something new. "We have a great mix of ages, and that's a good thing," Titterton said. Students who enroll in the program have the choice of taking just a few classes, earning a certificate of completion, or receiving a two-year degree in applied technology. "Those who finish the first year

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— Melissa Ayers

can expect to be prepared for an entry level job in a kitchen, pasty shop or bakery," he said. "In the second year of the program, their skills are honed because they work with beginning students and take courses geared toward bakery management. And if they take an additional three subjects, they'll earn a degree in applied technology." Titterton's favorite part of managing the program is seeing how the students grow professionally. "It's so gratifying to see a student walk out of here with skills and the opportunity to make this into a career," he said. "Here, a lot of what we do is repetitive, which is what

the students need to succeed. It's what makes us who we are." Melissa Ayers is a first year student from Camas. She said the baking program is a good fit for her skills. "Before this, I'd tried seven different careers and none worked for me," she said. "This program here is one of the best around. It actually took me two years to get in because the classes were always full." Ayers, 32, enjoys the hands-on experience the program offers. "I'm learning the whole system from start to finish," she said. "I have experience in front end restaurant work such as bartending and serving, but now I get to see the entire process." She plans on graduating from the program and going on to earn a bachelor's degree. "I'd like to open my own little café someday, but first I want to work in someone else's restaurant and see how everything is done, because 87 percent of all food places go out of business in the first year." Ayers' favorite area in the five-station rotation is the cake

room. "It's where I get to be the most challenged and creative," she said. Jenny Mears, a second year student, has always enjoyed baking. "Coming here is just a great experience for me," she said. Mears, 19, is a 2008 Camas High School graduate and works 30 hours a week at the Camas McDonald's in addition to attending school full-time. "I'm a manager there and it really helps over here, too," she said. "You need to be able to work with a variety of people and do several things." Her favorite station is also the cake room, and Ayers is currently enrolled in cake decorating as an elective. "It's a lot of hands-on work here," she said. "Having the experience and interacting with instructors is really good." She hopes to become employed at a Costco bakery and eventually move into management. "As a management student here, you get a lot of experience," she said. "I really enjoy it."