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Barren County Culinary Arts and WKU Dietetics create a recipe for student success

SUBMITTED 8 hrs ago



Business Expo breakfast provided by Barren County and Glasgow Culinary Arts Program students, supervised by Family Consumer Science Teachers Whitney Tallent (BCHS) and Misty Claywell (GHS) with guest speaker Super Chef Darnell F. Photos Submitted

Barren County School District's Nutrition Services Department and Western Kentucky University collaborate to provide post-baccalaureate program internship placements for WKU students. This program leads to a Graduate Certificate in Dietetic Practice, for students who qualify for the Dietetics Internship Program, and this semester, the BCS District welcomes Thomas Vertrees, a native of Illinois. Blending this program with the Barren County High School Culinary Arts program allows students to engage with college-level interns in addition to the professional staff of the Nutrition Services Department. This type of learning provides seamless transitions for both the high school and the graduate students to enter the workforce on various levels.

The Dietetic Internship (DI) at Western Kentucky University (WKU) has a concentration in Community Nutrition and resides in the Department of Applied Human Sciences (AHS) within the College of Health and Human Services (CHHS). The DI program is a full-time, nine-month program, accepting only 10 interns each year. Students will complete 32 weeks of supervised practice, with 12 weeks devoted to Medical Nutrition Therapy, 10 weeks to Community Nutrition and 10 weeks to Foodservice Systems Management. Supervised practice hours are 40 hours/week. The program includes 1,208 hours of dietetic supervised practice experiences with a concentration in Community Nutrition.

"This is a very competitive process for our interns, and we want to provide them with innovative and proven programs from which to learn and grow," stated Jane Simmons, Dietetic Internship Program director for WKU.

Vertrees began his placement under the direction of CheyAnne Fant, director of Nutrition Services for Barren County School District.

"Tom and the intern from last spring have been blessings to our staff, as we serve to learn from each other about new ideas and best practices for building skills in our department staff and with culinary students," Fant said.

Tasked to complete a variety of projects with the school system, Vertrees started by teaching proper service techniques and catering essentials to the Barren County High School Culinary I class in addition to following through with high school students as they cooked and served breakfast for the Glasgow-Barren County Chamber of Commerce Business Expo in partnership

with Glasgow High School Culinary Arts. During this event, Super Chef Darnell Ferguson, complimented the WKU Intern for his openness to try a variety of career opportunities to find his personal passion.

Vertrees stated, “I started this internship thinking that school nutrition was not in my plans, but I have grown fond of the interaction between the adults and students as mentors. “I wish that I had the opportunity in high school like the students of Barren County School District do to learn about culinary practices and potential careers in the foodservice and nutrition industry. Having these types of experiences before undergraduate studies can lead to many different and exciting career paths.”

Barren County High School Culinary Arts students are placed in cooperative workplace settings under the direction of Whitney Tallent, Culinary Arts teacher for BCHS.

“After these students learn fundamentals of food safety and commercial food practices, they can earn a National ServSafe Certification helping them qualify for management level positions in the tourism industry,” Tallent said.

The culinary arts pathway and cooperative work placements have been offered at Barren County High School since 1980s, and the demand for the program seems to increase each year. “With tourism as the third-largest revenue generating industry in Kentucky, behind automotive and health care, there is definitely a need to train young adults for tourism related careers,” Ann Stewart, Barren County Tourism Commission director, said. “In Barren County, there is a real need for hospitality skills to help build our economy since tourism jobs are included in the top three employers in our area.”

To finalize his placement with Barren County Schools, Vertrees will learn to conduct safety and sanitation inspections, practice guest satisfaction techniques and create new recipe formats for the Nutrition Services staff.

“As we start to employ younger populations, we must speak their language,” Fant said. “So, we are working on video-based recipes using iBook to share with staff to help provide consistent and quality foods for our students each day.”

To learn more about the WKU Dietetics Program, visit <https://www.wku.edu/ahs/dietetics/>. To learn more about the BC Nutrition Services and Culinary Departments, visit <http://www.barren.kyschools.us/CCR/Content/41100>.

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