Living the foodie dream

Riza (Parsons) Brown, A.A. Culinary Arts ’10, B.A. Journalism and Public Communications ’12

Culinary arts was an impulse for Riza Parsons at a time when she was feeling burnt out pursuing a bachelor’s degree in journalism. A foray into the epicurean field, though, effectively led to her current multi-faceted career as a caterer, a business owner and a food writer.

“I knew I liked to write,” says Riza, “but I didn’t really have a focus in my writing. Once I completed my associate degree in culinary arts, though, I realized I could easily pair it with food writing.”

Pursuing two degrees is ambitious, but Riza’s achievements aren’t too surprising when you consider her advice on how to be successful in pursuing your dreams.

“It’s very important to have a clear goal in mind and to talk about it and to visualize it and let everybody else around you know what you want,” Riza says. “I would get up in every journalism class and say I wanted to be a food writer. And one day it led to an opportunity to write a food column for the Anchorage Daily News.”

Riza started her catering company, Riza+Rachel Catering, in January 2011 with upwards of 15 years experience in the food industry, running the gamut from hostessing, bussing and waiting tables to cooking and bartending. What she loves most about being in the catering biz is the people: “That’s what makes me happiest—bringing people together over food.”

Sourcing local and seasonal ingredients whenever possible in her catering, Riza also has a passion for other cultures and the global food scene. Her bio on her company’s website, rizaandrachelmcatering.com, describes her as having “dashes of France, Sweden, Italy, Thailand, the Philippines, Mexico, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Spain.” All are places she has visited in the past that have influenced her recipes.

“Eventually, in the winter, I want to be able to travel and bring back different recipes, different ingredients and different cultures,” she says.

Look for Riza this fall during UAA’s 20th annual Celebrity Chef Invitational. She will lead a team of students in creating a portion of the menu that will be developed by local chef, Kirsten Dixon (more details inside). Riza is also excited about the possibility of providing internship opportunities for culinary arts students at her catering company in the future.

For a full profile on Riza, visit “I Am UAA” on greenandgold.uaa.alaska.edu.
Culinary Arts celebrating two anniversaries

The 2012–13 academic year marks the 40th anniversary of UAA's Culinary Arts program, and on its heels is the 20th anniversary of the department's signature annual benefit event, the Celebrity Chef Invitational. For this year's milestone occasion, the program welcomes Alaska's own Kirsten Dixon, award-winning chef and food writer from Within the Wild, Alaskan Adventure Lodges (www.withinthewild.com). Serving under her for the event will be five student teams (one per course on the menu), each headed by two culinary arts alumni. As always, the Celebrity Chef Invitational raises funds to provide scholarship opportunities to students and for maintenance of state-of-the-art learning facilities while showcasing UAA's talented Culinary Arts and Hospitality students to key players in Alaska's hospitality industry. This year's sold-out invitational will be held Sept. 19, 2012.

Upcoming Celebrity Chef Invitational guest star Kirsten Dixon (left) with her daughter, Mandy.

B.S. in dietetics answers a critical health care need

After many years of Alaska's health care industry crying out for more registered dietitians, CTC stepped up to the plate with the new B.S. in dietetics.

"There is an obesity and diabetes epidemic in the nation, and Alaska is no different," says Tim Doebler, director of UAA's Culinary Arts, Hospitality/Dietetics & Nutrition Division. "This degree is a direct response to a health crisis looming in the state."

With 42 declared majors, the bachelor's degree program in dietetics will enter its third year in 2012–13. It is designed as a statewide program. The general education and prerequisite courses can be taken at UA campuses around the state, and all dietetics and nutrition courses are offered online. For more information, call (907) 786-1276 or email DN@uaa.alaska.edu.

Scholarship student aiming for construction management degree

Melody Miller, class of 2015, is a standout student in CTC’s Construction Management Program. At Green Earth Landworks she is a manager foreman. At UAA, she has been a campus garden caretaker with the Sustainability Club and activity coordination officer for the Construction Management Club. She was inducted into Sigma Lambda Chi, the national construction honor society, last spring and is on track to be the first graduate of the Landscape Technician Apprenticeship Program through a partnership between Green Earth, the U.S. Department of Labor and Penn Foster Career School. Getting involved and having clear goals helped Melody earn the Construction Financial Management Association Ron Jones Endowed Scholarship for 2012–13. Learn more about Melody at greenandgold.uaa.alaska.edu/iamuaa.

Construction management student Melody Miller in her element at Green Earth Landworks.

Student excellence in action at 2012 Alaska SkillsUSA Contest

The UAA SkillsUSA Auto-Diesel Chapter, part of CTC's Transportation & Power Division, hosted the Alaska SkillsUSA Contest on March 21, 2012. The event is a showcase for UAA students who are preparing for careers in the Alaska transportation industry. Three students from the Heavy Duty Transportation Equipment Program at UAA received top honors: Derek Cottle (1st), Hans Hjort (2nd) and Jessie Occhino (3rd). During the competition, the students worked against the clock to prove their expertise in truck repair like electronics, preventative maintenance inspection, braking systems, diesel engines, general shop skills and drivetrains. All contests are run with the help of the industry, trade associations and labor organizations, and test competencies are set by industry.

“We are very proud of all the students’ accomplishments,” says John McCoy, a judge from sponsoring organization Carlile Transportation Systems. "It is exciting to see Alaskan students training here for careers in the diesel equipment technology industry. The competition is a testament to the true champions we are training and their individual dedication to excellence in their trade and their leadership skills.”

Gold winner Derek Cottle went on to compete at the national SkillsUSA leadership and skills event in Kansas City in June. Visit www.SkillsUSA.org for more information about the organization working to ensure America has a skilled workforce.
Legacy gift ties donor estate to the future of Alaska aviation

Future aviation students with CTC are set up to benefit from a generous bequest from Sarah Gay in honor of her late son John Russell Gay, a decorated sergeant in the U.S. Air Force (honorably discharged) who had plans to attend UAA. The John Russell Gay Memorial Aviation Scholarship will help support UAA students who are Alaska residents pursuing professional pilot training. Students must have high academic merit and be active duty military, National Guard or Reserve or have been honorably discharged. This endowed fund is an example of how an estate plan can be used for effective and meaningful student impact. It is what makes a good university great. If you are interested in similar planned giving, please contact a university development officer at (907) 786-4847 or toll free at (877) 482-2238.

New certificate in retail management fills a niche

CTC’s undergraduate certificate in retail management is designed to meet an acknowledged need in the Alaska retail industry. The curriculum incorporates skills in business writing, business math, computer applications, oral communications, management, bookkeeping/accounting, marketing, retailing, leadership and human resource management. Students have an opportunity to focus on either career/technical education or acquiring transferable credits for the future pursuit of associate and baccalaureate degrees in areas such as accounting, marketing, business, finance, communications, liberal arts and other disciplines in which general management competencies are important. Fully endorsed by the Western Association of Food Chains, this 30-credit certificate is offered through UAA’s Chugiak-Eagle River Campus in conjunction with the UAA College of Business and Public Policy. The certificate was developed in collaboration with the University of Alaska Fairbanks Community & Technical College.

CTC expands effort to educate and train learners in their golden years

CTC was among 11 colleges selected last year by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) to participate in the Plus 50 Completion Strategy, a new grant-funded initiative for baby boomers who would like to finish their degree or certificate. The new completion effort builds on AACC’s Plus 50 Initiative, which has devoted the last three years to helping colleges improve services and support for baby boomers.

The Plus 50 Completion Strategy is funded with a four-year grant from Lumina Foundation, as well as support from The Atlantic Philanthropies. For more information, please contact Kevin O’Connor, completion coordinator, at (907) 786-6482, or fill out an interest form at www.uaa.alaska.edu/ccc/plus50.

Air Force numbers reach milestone

This spring, Air Force ROTC Detachment 001* commissioned its 100th lieutenant in the United States Air Force. Lieutenant Ashley Truswell graduated from UAA’s nursing program, entered the Air Force and is now serving as a nurse at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson. Ashley joins a long list of alumni who have gone on to serve the country in various capacities in the following worldwide career fields: Air Force pilots, cyber space officers, space and missile officers, nurses and security force officers to name a few.

Alaska Middle College School opens on Chugiak-Eagle River Campus

New for the 2012–13 school year is the Alaska Middle College School. Located on UAA’s Chugiak-Eagle River Campus, the school is an early college program that will allow junior and senior Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District (MSBSD) students to earn credits toward a UAA Associate of Arts degree while completing their high school diploma. Drawn from the five pre-existing high schools in the Mat-Su Valley, students will take classes that satisfy both UAA general education and MSBSD high school diploma requirements. This new choice for Mat-Su students will help them get college-ready and will also shorten the time and money it typically takes a student to get a degree. For more information, visit www.matsuk12.us/acs.
Greetings,

I hope you enjoy the new look of the Community & Technical College’s annual newsletter CTC Matters! While the look may be new, the message is the same—CTC continues its tradition of providing access to the educational opportunities that students need to be successful in college and to gain the job skills needed to advance their careers in Alaska.

At UAA’s commencement last May more than 350 students graduated from CTC’s 45 certificate and degree programs. The college now has more than 4,000 alumni, many of whom remain actively involved with their program through participation on one of the college’s 17 program advisory boards. Alumni and industry advisors help keep CTC programs focused on high-quality job skills and career readiness. CTC also has strong partnerships with the Anchorage and Mat-Su School Districts to improve students’ college transition and provide opportunities for students to earn college credit while they are still in high school.

Reflecting on the growth of CTC’s programs over the past 15 years, the college has made a significant impact on Alaska’s workforce and economic development. The stories in this newsletter highlight just a few of the great things that CTC alumni, students, faculty and staff have been doing over the past year.

We can all be proud of CTC’s commitment to working with alumni, employers and school districts to ensure that CTC matters to students and to the community.

If you are an alum and have a story to share about your experience at CTC, email me at krschmitt@uaa.alaska.edu.

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