

Students cooking up a career?

Mankato high-schoolers tour area restaurants

By Tanner Kent

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MANKATO — Who knows? Maybe someday a local restaurant menu will feature Brooke Rotchadl's homemade macaroni and cheese.

Or perhaps Stacy Knatcal's signature pumpkin bars.

But for now, they are just ninth-graders who share an interest in cooking and a curiosity for careers in culinary fields.

" I really like cooking," Knatcal said. "I'm thinking about it."

Rotchadl pondered: "Maybe a restaurant manager."

The pair of West students had their first taste of the industry on Wednesday when about 120 Mankato students toured a handful of local restaurants as well as the South Central College culinary arts program.

All the high-schoolers are enrolled in cooking- related elective courses, and many of them are likely to pursue a

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Pub 500's Tom Frederick gives Mankato East and West culinary students a tour of the restaurant's kitchen.

Pat Christman

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COOKING: Matching skills

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food- related job in the future — whether part time in college or full time in the future.

“ The goal is to try and help kids match their skills, interests and values with a career path,” said Monde Schwartz, career and technical education coordinator for Mankato Area Public Schools.

At Pub 500, owner Tom Frederick gave students a primer on his business model.

He told them the pub prides itself on being a “place for gathering” and chose a circular bar in the middle of the establishment to encourage that atmosphere. He talked about the importance of distinguishing Pub 500’s product from other bars by offering live trivia, poker tournaments and a monthly open mic night.

Students toured the kitchen, which is capable of cooking 400 meals an hour. And Frederick told them a restaurant’s secret to success is its ability to operate efficiently — especially during the busiest times.

“ You have to make hay when the sun is shining,” he said.

Several Mankato and North Mankato restaurants participated in the tours, including Culver’s in North Mankato, Famous Dave’s, The Neighbor’s, Number 4 Restaurant, TGI Friday’s, Angie’s Kettle Corn and the Wow Zone.

In addition, Pub 500, the downtown Buffalo Wild Wings, Olives, Dino’s Pizzeria and Northwoods Cafe and Grill hosted a tour and offered lunch to students.

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