

FEATURED

Culinary Olympian sculpts sugar creations during tech school demonstration

By Jessica Iannetta jiannetta@cecilwhig.com Jan 12, 2017



CECIL WHIG PHOTO BY JESSICA IANNETTA

Chef Susan Notter shows how to pull sugar during a demonstration for students at the Cecil County School of Technology on Wednesday.

ELKTON — After just about an hour in the kitchen at the Cecil County School of Technology, chef Susan Notter created a parrot, a flower and a tree trunk stand for the bird — all out of sugar.

Or as she put it:

“Thirty years and an hour,” Notter said with a laugh. “The more you do, the better you get.”

In those 30 years, Notter, 56, has built up quite a resume. She currently serves as the pastry arts director for the Pennsylvania School of Culinary Arts but has also participated in various culinary competitions, including “Cupcake Wars,” “Halloween Wars” and “Food Network Challenge” and the International Exhibit of Culinary Arts, better known as the Culinary Olympics.

Notter visited the tech school on Wednesday morning to give a demonstration of sugar techniques to students in the school’s culinary program. As she demonstrated how to spin, cast, pull and blow sugar to make the sculpture, Notter also gave students advice and talked about her own journey through the culinary world.

After growing up in England, Notter recalled getting on a plane for the first time ever to take a culinary job in Germany. She had never been to Germany before or lived on her own. She’d never even been on a plane. But she encouraged students to embrace those types of opportunities and not be afraid to take chances.

“Take the challenge but then figure out, if it doesn’t go right, what am I going to do?” she said. “The easiest thing to do is to stay home.”

Notter has stayed at home very little over the course of her career, traveling all over Europe and the United States for different jobs and culinary competitions, all the while building up her reputation as the go-to person for decorative sugar pieces.

That reputation is one of the reasons she was chosen for the Culinary Olympics, an international competition typically held in Germany where teams of chefs from over 50 countries compete in different culinary categories. Notter was one of two pastry chefs and the only woman on the U.S. team that won three gold medals and was ranked fourth in the world at the 2016 competition.

Her expertise has also helped her get jobs that require a very specific set of skills. Notter recalled receiving a call from the CEO of a major company who wanted some decorative sugar pieces for an event. She created 700 sugar napkin holders for the event, earning her a \$6,000 paycheck.

"For someone like that, it doesn't matter what it costs, it's what they want," Notter said, encouraging the students to develop their own speciality in whatever field they pursue.

For the culinary students, Notter's demonstration was a great way to see these types of skills demonstrated by a world-class chef.



"It was cool watching her do so much in an hour and how she used so many different techniques," said Jamie Gwinn, a senior at Elkton High School.

Jahquana Bond, also an EHS senior, enjoyed Notter's presentation, and even got to participate after volunteering to try spinning sugar.

"I felt like a professional for a moment," Bond said with a laugh.

And while Bond, like many of the other culinary students, doesn't plan to go into the food industry, Notter told them that regardless of what profession they choose, the important thing is to work hard and be passionate about that work.

"Find the thing that you enjoy," she encouraged the students. "What's going to get you out of bed on a Monday morning and make you happy?"