

Vancouver Island University (VIU) to launch Farm to Plate Culinary Training at Providence Farm, North Cowichan, Vancouver Island

North America's first farm to plate professional culinary training is set to start at VIU Cowichan. Culinary Institute of Vancouver Island Cowichan Campus Culinary Arts program at Providence Farm begins their Professional Cook level 1 on February 6, 2013. Chef Instructor Allan Aikman is excited at the prospect of teaching the students the fundamentals of professional cooking with the emphasis on fresh and local. In fact it doesn't get any more local than Providence Farm. The farm has 400 acres to grow food and through a creative partnership with Vancouver Island University, the farm will produce much of what the Culinary Institute's students will be cooking and preparing for the Providence Farm dining room.

Chef Aikman says, "It's a natural fit. The farm has a restaurant, banquet facilities, a general store and a wood burning brick oven." Aikman also has plenty of experience in the Providence Farm kitchen and feels it is an exciting location that has hosted many functions including the Canadian Chef Congress. He has helped with the James Barber Fundraiser for Providence Farm, Island Chefs Collaborative and Farm to Fork and Slow Food fundraisers.

Traditionally Providence farm has many programs on its property. They are a therapeutic community that provides programs for people who are encountering barriers to education and employment. These programs include Horticultural Therapy and Vocational Training.

The Sisters of St. Ann gifted the beautiful 400-acre Cowichan Valley property to the Vancouver Island Providence Community Association to develop innovative programs for the community.

Today there are 34 full-time and part-time staff and 130 people participate in the programs. A single guiding principle underlies their success – that caring for the land together is by nature healing and therapeutic.

In keeping with the community spirit, the partnership between Providence Farm and VIU will benefit both. The Cowichan culinary program is now closer to the new VIU Campus and students will have easier access to student services and the university itself. Providence farm will be able to not only provide ingredients for the program but they also have numerous programs on the farm that will happen in conjunction with the cooking program. For example, the wood shop may make the dining room tables, the weaving program may make table runners.

Culinary Institute of Vancouver Island students begin the program as level 1 cook apprentices, continue through a work practicum and Level 2 technical training and are on their way to becoming Red Seal Cooks. In addition, Cowichan grads can join with the Culinary Institute of Vancouver Island (CIVI) at VIU Nanaimo that offers a second year diploma in culinary training and management skills, giving them the leading edge to advancement and progression in the culinary profession.

Emphasis in the program is on practical assignments in farm restaurant setting that is open to the public. Students are introduced to and engaged in the planting, growing and harvesting of ingredients cooked for sale in the dining room. All aspects of cooking are covered including, Diet and Nutrition, Breakfast, Meat Cutting, Meat, Poultry, Seafood Cookery, Garde Manger(cold kitchen), Vegetable and Starch Cookery, Pastry and Desserts.

For information and admission into the program, go to www.viu.ca/culinary and click on Cowichan.

James Barber Fundraiser for Providence Farm photo gallery

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/mssocietycrc/sets/72157629674231541/show/>

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