

'Students will be able to sample what they've made, talk about it, maybe critique it and go home with recipes they can re-create. I want people to leave having had a good time, feeling warm and sparkly inside.'

PATRICIA PORITZKY, founder of Let's Cook!



Patricia Poritzky gets everything in place for the upcoming classes at Let's Cook!

SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

SHARPEN YOUR CULINARY CHOPS

NEW COOKING SCHOOL LET'S COOK! SET TO SWING ITS DOORS OPEN TO LOCAL HOME COOKS

By ROSY WEISER

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SOQUEL — For Christmas, Patricia Poritzky surprised her husband by sponsoring a 5-year-old ewe named Hibiscus, and thus gave him the rights to his own miniature cheese and milk factory for a season. This is a woman who loves food, especially locally produced, wholesome fare like fresh dairy from a farm animal she's met personally.

In fact, for the better part of the past year, Poritzky has been crafting a food-related and inspired venture she believes Santa Cruz County will lap up — a recreational cooking school. Let's Cook! is set to begin classes in about two weeks.

The school will operate out of a commercial kitchen in Soquel and will feature hands-on, interactive and demonstration classes taught by local chefs and instructors geared specifically to the home cook. Course topics will change with the seasons and run the gamut from pasta making, to cooking with wild mushrooms, to bread baking, to France Romance, a date-night event for couples. Hands-on classes will run about three hours, with dem-



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Let's Cook! owner Patricia Poritzky gives a tour of the kitchen to Cabrillo College Culinary Arts Director Eric Carter, who will teach a class there.

onstration classes about two. Classes will cost about \$50 to \$65 each.

"Students will be able to sample what they've made, talk about it, maybe critique it and go home with

recipes they can re-create," Poritzky explained. "I want people to leave having had a good time, feeling warm and

SEE CLASSES ON C3

CLASSES

Continued from C1

sparkly inside," she said, making it clear she's considering each event as carefully as throwing a party.

The hands-on classes will be limited to about 15 participants, while some of the demonstration classes, such as a planned snout-to-tail class on pig butchering to be taught by El Salchichero's Chris LaVeque, could include up to about 30 students.

Poritzky's focus will be on organic, sustainable, local ingredients from area farms [within a 100-mile radius in true "locavore" spirit] and on showcasing the impressive knowledge of a band of area food experts such as Eric Carter, director of culinary arts and hospitality management at Cabrillo College.

"This is something that can serve the community in a way that Cabrillo doesn't. Hobby cooking is really important for enhancing people in their personal lives," Carter said, explaining that budget cuts have pared down his program to core classes targeted mostly to professional development. "We've had to cut anything that sounds like an elective."

Carter will be teaching a knife skills class that starts Jan. 12, along with one on sauces in which students will learn how to make and add "moistness, richness and flavor" to sauces like bechamels, espagnols and veloutes.

Poritzky, a reputed cook in her own right, at least among friends, says she learned fine cooking in her 20s.

"I was in sales, making a lot of money and had access to all these great cheese shops," she said. "I got hooked up with a big foodie group and a lot of them worked in restaurants." She also looked in books and took a couple of recreational cooking classes in cities like Oakland, Chicago and New York

that served as models for her school.

Later, working as a massage therapist and birth doula, and raising two daughters, she started a cooking club with some girlfriends.

"The idea of this school was born out of me and her other friends asking, 'Will you teach me how to do stuff?'" said Dana Buckler, a friend who is volunteering as a chef's assistant in exchange for free classes at Let's Cook! "[She] would invite us over to dinner and make things that I would see in the store but I wouldn't know what to do with, like kale or fennel," she added, noting that not only is her friend a good cook, "She's a good business

woman, too; she's done her homework."

IF YOU GO

LET'S COOK!

WHAT: A cooking school aimed at home cooks set to open in Soquel next month. Patricia Poritzky is the owner and founder.

WHERE: 2880 Research Park, Soquel, Suite 200

UPCOMING CLASSES: Knife Skills with Eric Carter, Jan. 12; Pasta 101 with Mike Ruymen [aka Pasta Mike], Jan. 14; Chicken 101 with chef Brad Briske, Jan. 19. Classes are 6:30-9:30 p.m. and cost \$55 each, on average. Preregistration required.

LECTURERS: Poritzky is tapping a wealth of local culinary experts to teach. Among them: Artisan butcher Chris LaVeque of El Salchichero; wine expert Sue Slater; jam maker Anna Cameron; Cabrillo instructor Hector Quiroz; master baker Stephany Buswell; and chocolate maker Jen Ashby of Ashby Confections.

DETAILS: For more information or to register for classes, visit www.letscooksantacruz.com or call 419-2747.

OTHER COOKING RESOURCES

Let's Cook! cooking school is the first in the county dedicated solely to classes for home cooks, though both Love Apple Farms in Santa Cruz [www.growbetterveggies.com] and New Leaf Community Markets [www.newleaf.com] offer cooking and food-making classes, many of them taught by pro chefs and culinary experts. There also are many home-based chefs who offer private lessons, among them Chowhound Cooking Classes in Aptos [www.chowhoundcooks.com] and caterers who also offer lessons, among them Lifestyle Culinary Arts [www.lifestyleculinary.com] in Scotts Valley.

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