

Chili Recipe Stirs Up Job For Auburn Woman With Down Syndrome

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Nick Meyer/staff photo - ABOVE: Christine Elliott, who has Down syndrome, cooks ground beef while making her award-winning chili in the kitchen at 3Cs Family Restaurant, Port Clinton. BELOW: Elliott prepares to open cans of tomatoes for the dish.



An Auburn woman's chili recipe has stirred up a job for her.

The 3Cs Family Restaurant, Port Clinton, was impressed enough with Christine Elliott, 19, that it gave her a position on its staff - provided she bring her recipe with her.

Elliott, who has Down syndrome, has been working two days a week for two months at the eatery, learning everything she can about the restaurant business, while at the same time prepping the ingredients for her spicy chili, which took first place at the 2006 Schuylkill County Fair.

"It's been fun," Brian Crouse, restaurant manager, said. "Everyone needs to learn to interact with all kinds of people and she helps us as much as we help her. She is such a fun person and we all get along great in the kitchen."

Elliott has a job mentor, Debbie Sinkovich, an employment specialist with AHEDD, based in Pottsville.

AHEDD is a private, nonprofit organization founded in 1977 to serve as a catalyst in the employment and development of people with disabilities.

"We are working on a system for Chrissy to get her faster," Sinkovich said.

Sinkovich will be available to Elliott as long as it takes to get her up to speed.

According to restaurant owner David B. Crouse, Elliott is a fast learner.

"No matter what we ask her to do, wash dishes, bus tables, whatever, she picks up quickly," Crouse said. "And she is such a positive and big-hearted person, she is a real shot in the arm for us."

Brian Crouse agreed, saying, "She has everything we showed her so far down pat," he said.

Elliott graduated last year from Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29.

"I can't say enough about the IU," Elliott's mother, Mary Ellen Miller, said. "She did so well in the program there and her teachers were so wonderful. She has learned so many skills."

Miller said Elliott attended a weeklong job preparation class held at Schuylkill Training and Technology's North Campus for the past three years and that program also helped her land a job.

She was taught how to fill out a job application, how to dress for and what to say on a job interview and other skills used to gain employment.

Through AHEDD, Elliott learned what opportunities were available to her and what type of job she should be looking for based on her skills and interests.

"I like to cook," Elliott said. "I like to help my mom bake cookies and do other things in the kitchen."

The AHEDD staff capitalized on Elliott's interest and matched her with Crouse, who was willing to take her on as part of the restaurant staff.

"It was a combination of her personality and skills that led us to agree to take her on. Of course, her chili recipe was also a draw," Crouse said.

Crouse said he has helped other agencies in the past with job shadowing but this is the first time he has employed someone from AHEDD.

"I am hoping that other parents of children like Christine will see this and know that there are so many opportunities out there," Miller said. "My hope is that she will learn a skill and be able to eventually live on her own or with a roommate under the right supervision. I want to know she will have something in the future."

Elliott's chili is served at 3Cs Family Restaurant on Wednesdays.

You can get a taste of the award winning fare by the cup, bowl or in a southwest tortilla bowl.

Crouse said customers have a choice between the restaurant's sweeter variety and Elliott's spicier version.

"They are different enough that they don't compete with each other," Crouse said.

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