



Press Release

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Cal High Culinary Academy Students Dedicate Kitchen to Chef Marco Zapien

WHITTIER – Dozens of students in California High School’s Culinary Arts Academy who are learning to whip up sizzling recipes and concoct delicious innovative creations dedicated a “kitchen” to a local inspiration of their own – Chef Marco Zapien, executive chef and owner of Zapien’s Salsa Grill and Taqueria in Pico Rivera.

Under the direction of lead teacher Corey Duarte, culinary students are divided into smaller individual groups, or “kitchens,” for more hands-on experience and an interactive learning environment. The kitchens are named for famous chefs, such as Julia Child, Bobby Flay and Rachel Ray.

Zapien – an active volunteer and donor to the program for 15 years – was recognized for his contributions by junior and senior culinary apprentices during a Sept. 28 dedication ceremony that featured a continental breakfast prepared by the students.

“To be a part of this and be recognized means a lot and I really appreciate it,” said Zapien, surrounded by family, his restaurant culinary team and students. “I hope that what you learn you will take with you in your future endeavors. This is always fun for me and I look forward to many more years of doing it.”

The Culinary Arts Academy has been in place at Cal High for close to 20 years, teaching students to work in a fast-paced environment and take on such duties as executive chef, sous chef and line cook.

Each year, the three-year program enrolls a new class of about 40 sophomores, who also take a regular load of core academic subjects. Students participate in career training and gain weekly work experience at such places as the Presbyterian Intercommunity Hospital cafeteria and Crepes and Grapes Cafe in Whittier.

Twice a year, Zapien attends a culinary career day at which he demonstrates his recipes, mentors students about the intensity of the culinary world and skills needed to succeed, and regularly donates supplies.

“He really inspires us to do what we want to do and achieve our goals,” said senior Jayla Beltran, an aspiring baker. “He shows us what it takes to be successful in the industry and shares skills that we will carry with us forever. He’s so inspiring.”

In addition to his duties at the family-owned restaurant, Zapien founded Black Tie & Blue Jeans Catering and is the corporate chef in charge of Sport and Entertainment for Melissa’s Southern California

Customers. A graduate of the Los Angeles Culinary Institute, Zapien was the executive chef at the Pond of Anaheim and worked in stadiums and arenas across the country.

Duarte said Zapien is a perfect example of the academy's theme this year: Kick it up a notch.

"Marco is just an incredible guy who has done so much to help our program and talks to our kids about following their dreams," Duarte said. "He's really encouraging. I can't think of anyone who is a better of example of what it means to be successful than Chef Zapien. This dedication is just a small way for our students to show what an impact he's made."

Ninety-eight percent of Cal High culinary students go on to pursue post-secondary education, including technical/vocational schools, community college or four-year universities.

Beltran, who joined the program after hearing positive stories from former students, said she couldn't think of a better way to end her high school career at Cal High.

"It's not just an academy. It's a bond you build with people," Beltran said. "It's a family."

PHOTO CAPTION:

ZAPIEN: California High School's Culinary Arts Academy dedicate a "kitchen" to Chef Marco Zapien, executive chef and owner of Zapien's Salsa Grill and Taqueria in Pico Rivera during a dedication ceremony on Sept. 28. Zapien poses with senior culinary students who prepared a continental breakfast for the special occasion.

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The Whittier Union High School District provides all students with an engaging, quality standards-based instructional program delivered by a well-trained staff resulting in improved student achievement. Whittier Union High School District works to achieve and maintain excellence in providing a comprehensive education for all students.

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