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Holyoke Community College will welcome the first classes of students to its new culinary institute tomorrow when the spring semester begins. Here, in the production kitchen at the HCC-MGM Culinary Arts Institute are, from left, Jeff Hayden, the college's vice president for business and community; hospitality and culinary arts lab technician Maureen Hindle; Michele Cabral, interim dean of business technology and culinary arts; and Warren Leigh, Hospitality and Culinary Arts Department chair. To see a gallery of photos of the institute, go online to MassLive.com. (MARK M. MURRAY / THE REPUBLICAN)

HOLYOKE

Cooking for the future

More than a year in making, HCC opens culinary institute



The Holyoke Community College-MGM Culinary Arts Institute is located at the corner of Race and Appleton streets in downtown Holyoke. The casino company donated \$500,000 to help establish the state-of-the-art facility in the Cubit building.

(MARK M. MURRAY / THE REPUBLICAN)

BY JIM KINNEY
jkinney@repub.com

Warren Leigh, chairman of hospitality management and culinary arts programs at Holyoke Community College, looked over the student lounge at college's new culinary arts institute one day this week.

He put himself in the shoes of a high school student trying to decide

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“We have the latest and greatest and newest and most wonderful culinary arts in New England that is owned by a public institution.”

WARREN LEIGH, CHAIRMAN, HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT AND CULINARY ARTS DEPARTMENT AT HCC

Cooking

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among HCC and bigger-name culinary programs like the Culinary Institute of America or Johnson & Wales University.

“We are going to change some minds,” Leigh said. “When they see this facility, we are going to change some minds.”

The first classes begin tomorrow when the spring semester starts. The culinary institute at 164 Race St. in downtown Holyoke is a seven-minute drive from Holyoke Community College’s main campus on Homestead Avenue.

The college’s old culinary department space featured one kitchen and a small area for baking, Leigh explained while leading a tour at the Cubit Building.

The new 20,000-square-foot, \$7.5-million HCC-MGM Culinary Institute has five kitchens, including a fully functional restaurant production kitchen, separate lab stations and a bakery. The kitchens include a demonstration kitchen where students first watch and learn about techniques and culinary science.

The institute occupies two floors of the building.

“We have the latest and greatest and newest and most wonderful culinary arts institute in New England that is owned by a public institution,” Leigh said.

The dining room seats 80 for table service. There are also three classrooms on the second floor. One of those classrooms will be set up as a hotel lab, outfitted with a front desk and a bedroom.

In classrooms, students will learn sanitary food handling, safe serving of alcohol and mathematics.

Add a lounge and changing areas where students can get in and out of their chef’s



The teaching lab the Holyoke Community College-MGM Culinary Arts Institute located at the corner of Race and Appleton streets is now open. (MARK M. MURRAY/THE REPUBLICAN)

clothes, and the institute has everything an aspiring culinary or hospitality professional could want or need, Leigh says.

“What I like best about this facility is its sense of community,” he said. “When our students come here, this will be their facility. This will be their space.”

The facilities can accommodate 150 students or so at a time, according to Michele Cabral, interim dean for business and technology. There are only about 130 students in the college’s culinary and hospitality programs, a number she’d like to double to keep the classrooms and kitchens busy throughout the day.

Programs include certificates in hospitality and culinary arts and associate degrees in hospitality management and applied sciences-culinary arts.

This new applied sciences-culinary arts degree, which has yet to be formally approved, is designed to be in tune with the skills that employers are looking for today, Cabral said.

Associate degree students will continue to take general education courses at the

Homestead Avenue campus.

MGM Resorts International has its name on the building after making a \$500,000 donation toward its construction and fitting out, said Jeffrey Hayden, the college’s vice president for business and community services.

MGM Springfield plans to hire about 200 line cooks for its opening in September, Hayden said, and MGM will have its chefs demonstrate the latest techniques and best practices to students at the culinary institute.

The institute doesn’t exist only as a feeder to MGM as the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County a year ago identified 1,700 vacant jobs in food service and hospitality in Hampden County, says Hayden. The college is working with dozens of employers, he said.

With a two-year, associate’s degree in hand, a student can leave HCC with training to qualify for a supervisory position in a kitchen or restaurant or move on to a four-year bachelor’s degree program.

Holyoke Community College is also offering enrichment learn-to-cook classes for the home cook starting on Feb. 9 at the Cubit Building.



Warren Leigh, chairman of the Holyoke Community College Hospitality Management and Culinary Arts Department, stands inside the bake shop at the culinary institute.

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Warren Leigh, chairman of the Holyoke Community College Hospitality and Culinary Arts Department, stands inside the bake shop at the culinary arts institute. (MARK M. MURRAY/THE REPUBLICAN)