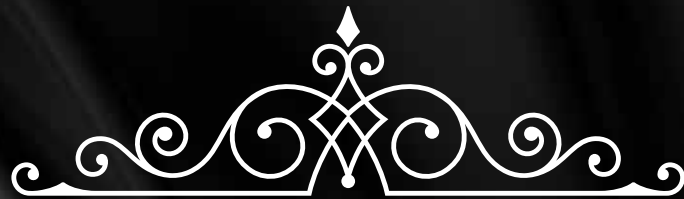




**COOKING UP
CAREERS AT**



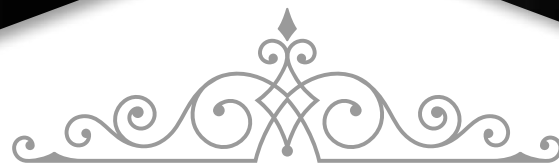
ALERE

AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE



**TRI-C STUDENTS GAIN
HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE RUNNING
THEIR OWN RESTAURANT**

STORY AND PHOTOS BY Noelle Bye and Tamara London



The sounds of chopping knives and shouted orders fill the bustling kitchen. As customers flow into the dining room, staff members emerge with ambitious and diverse fare like Tex-Mex egg rolls, blackened salmon and molten chocolate lava cake.

And Tri-C students are behind the entire operation.

Tucked into a corner of the College's Jerry Sue Thornton Center on East 22nd Street, Alere (Latin for "to nourish") gives Hospitality Management students a taste of life in the restaurant business.

"It's something that speaks to me," said Devaughn Maxwell, 26, who is working at Alere this semester. "It's a hands-on experience, and I'm really good at working with my hands. It's the best way for me to learn things and retain information."

Featuring cuisine from across the globe, the weekly menu is created and prepared by Tri-C culinary students under the supervision of faculty advisors and instructors.

Chef Katherine George, a lecturer in Tri-C's Hospitality Management Center of Excellence, currently heads up the kitchen. She is one of the many faculty in Hospitality Management that brings not just classical culinary education, but decades of industry experience.

"Since Alere is student-staffed, the process involves communicating with incoming students to see what experience they've had in commercial kitchens," she said. "We then work together to put dishes on the menu that will make their experience challenging, but not overwhelming. The idea is to have them step outside their comfort zone, learn new things and feel a little bit of heat in the kitchen — while still serving great food."

While some students are rookies, others are restaurant veterans. Maxwell and former Alere staffer Siriphan "Kiwi" Wongpeng fall into the latter category. Maxwell has been cooking for 23 years — going back to the green cupcakes he concocted at age 3. Wongpeng, 36, has run Lakewood's Thai Thai with her family for seven years. During her time at Alere in Spring 2021, she picked up culinary and management skills that she can apply to her own business.



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— Chef Katherine George, Lecturer, Tri-C's Hospitality Management Center of Excellence



“I got real-life experience at Alere, and it will help me make a smoother transition from school to the food industry,” she said.

Each week, a different student is responsible for putting together a three-course Chef de Cuisine special that includes an appetizer, entrée and dessert. The student also acts as chef, taking responsibility for all aspects of their dishes and running the kitchen.

“My favorite memory at Alere was when my Chef de Cuisine special featuring Thai food sold out,” Wongpeng said. “I was proud to present food from my background.”

Before working at Alere, students typically go through eight to 10 courses in restaurant and dining room operations, with at least three focused on cooking and baking. They spend eight weeks in the kitchen and eight weeks in the dining room, working each position as they move through the semester.

Alex Richardson, 20, spent the first eight weeks of Fall 2022 in the “back of the house” — restaurant lingo for “in the kitchen” — where he prepped and cooked food. His second eight weeks were spent in the “front of the house,” hosting and serving food.

“Alere has helped me a lot because of the staff,” Richardson said. “You get the job done well at the end of the day. Teamwork makes the dream work.”

The students who fare best in Alere’s fast-paced setting are adaptable and communicate effectively, George said.

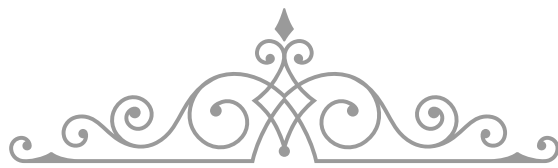
“The camaraderie among students develops almost immediately. They enjoy each other’s company, so they start to lift each other up.”

Alere is the latest incarnation of a student-run restaurant at Tri-C. It replaced the former Bistro 87, located on the Metropolitan Campus, in 2018.

“When the Alex B. Johnson Campus Center was designed, there was no space to house Bistro 87,” George said. “We operated out of the Hospitality Management Center on Public Square until space was identified at the Jerry Sue Thornton Center; then we worked with architects to renovate and create what is now Alere.”

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— Siriphan Wongpeng, Former Alere Staffer



The restaurant serves about 100-120 customers each week. Alere also caters private lunches at the restaurant and select gatherings at the College's Jerry Sue Thornton Center and Hospitality Management Center.

After an unprecedented interruption to the hospitality industry during the COVID-19 pandemic, Alere is giving prospective restaurateurs and chefs vital experiences they can apply to the dining rooms of the future.

"Hospitality establishment owners and managers are facing so many challenges in the 'new, now' normal," George said. "When employers are searching for new, well-rounded employees to give them insight into how to navigate these challenges, our students can be those employees."

The good news is that, though the restaurant industry may be changing, it isn't going anywhere.

"You'll always make money because everybody needs to eat," Maxwell said. "That's my motto. Everyone needs to eat, so you'll always have a profit."

Alere is open Thursdays and Fridays from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. for the Spring 2023 semester. Call 216-987-4080 for reservations or carryout orders. Visit www.tri-c.edu/alere for more information.

