



Rebecca Lhotka (right) puts more beans in her team's chili Friday at the fifth annual High School Hospitality and Culinary Arts Student Summit and Chili Cook-Off at Lake Michigan College. Heather Adler (left) chops a green pepper while teammate Beth Alles stands ready to help. All three are seniors at St. Joseph High School. They call their team "Girls on Fire." Photos by Louise Wrege / HP staff

## A different kind of BOWL SEASON

High schoolers battle in chili competition

By LOUISE WREGE  
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**BENTON TOWNSHIP** — The mouth-watering smell of chili drifted down the hall of the Mendel Center when 22 teams competed Friday in the fifth annual High School Hospitality and Culinary Arts Student Summit and Chili Cook-Off at Lake Michigan College.

Mark Smith, a certified executive chef and one of the three judges, said he was impressed by what he tasted and saw.

"I like seeing high school students like this taking the next step and being creative and adding their own twists to the dishes," he said as he circulated among the students.

Smith is an instructor at the college in culinary arts. He said this was his third year judging the competition.

The teams were from high schools in St. Joseph, Kalamazoo RESA, Niles and River Valley.

They had to create chili and corn bread, from scratch using no stove. They were allowed only



Thomas Bellio, a senior at St. Joseph High School, chops bacon for the corn bread during the fifth annual High School Hospitality and Culinary Arts Student Summit and Chili Cook-Off at the Mendel Center. He was a member of the team called "Nasty Nick and the Ballers."

portable butane burners.

"It's more challenging, but it turns out all right," said Raven Wright, a member of the Girls on Fire cooking team and a senior at St. Joseph High School.

"I really enjoy doing

this," said Rebecca Lhotka, another Girls on Fire member and senior at St. Joseph High School. "Cooking is something I'm passionate about."

Nick Stants, a junior at St. Joseph High School, said he also loves cooking.

"I want to go to culinary school some day," said the leader of the team called Nasty Nick and the Ballers.

He said his chili was his own special recipe with green peppers, red and black beans, crushed and stewed tomatoes, ground beef, spices and bacon as a garnish.

Lauri Berry, culinary arts teacher at St. Joseph High School, said she brought 21 students divided into six teams.

She said this is the first of two competitions this school year. In March, she said teams will compete in plating food that includes a protein, starch and vegetable. That competition will include an interview, which will give the students a job-searching experience.

After the competition, students toured the college's new activity center, the Hawk's Nest, and saw a demo room for the students residence hall, which is being built.

Chris Woodruff, hospitality management chairman, said the residence hall is expected to be ready for students by fall 2014.

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