

OPENING DAY SPEECH

Good afternoon and welcome to Opening Day 2012! Starting a new academic year is always exciting and it's great to see everyone back together after our summer break.

This summer, as I have worked on advancing our campaign to raise money to build a culinary arts institute at COC, I've spent a lot of time in restaurants and with restaurant owners. As we move forward with our capital campaign in the coming year to build an on campus location for our Institute for Culinary Education, I have had many conversations about what it takes to make it in this ultra-competitive business market. And the more we've talked, the more I've realized that great colleges have much in common with the best restaurants.

Chef Thomas Keller, founder of Napa Valley's famed eatery The French Laundry, said, "For a restaurant to be good, so many pieces have to come together." And isn't that true of a college? Look at the number of employees here, and the variety of departments, and how resilient and creative you are. It is an incredibly complex operation.

There are five key pieces that must come together for a restaurant to be successful:

- Menu.
- Ingredients.
- Atmosphere.
- Service.
- And reputation.

The last one is dependent on how well you execute the others.

The best restaurants masterfully blend these elements together to create the ultimate dining experience. And at the college, we have very similar parallels that determine our success in creating the best educational experience for our students. Make no mistake. It's not easy to do that consistently. As Howard Ziebold, CEO of the Culinary Institute of America said, "Don't aspire to be a flash-in-the-pan or only the flavor of the month. It takes hard work to be successful in this industry."

The pinnacle of recognition for a restaurant is inclusion in the fabled Michelin Guide. First published in France more than 100 years ago, the Michelin Guide was the definitive source of travel information for drivers touring in Europe. Today, just a mention in the guide puts a restaurant on the map. And to receive one, two, or three coveted stars is the ultimate validation of a restaurant's success. Michelin itself says, "To have earned one or more stars means that a restaurant is one of the best not only in its country but also in the world."

One star is given to a very good restaurant in its category.

Two stars are awarded for excellent cooking that is worth a detour.

And restaurants honored with three stars are noted for exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey. "One always eats extremely well here, sometimes superbly," Michelin says.

Just how difficult is it to win a coveted Michelin star? Consider this: In Los Angeles, home to Wolfgang Puck, the original celebrity chef, there are only 12 restaurants with star status. Eight received one star. And only four have two stars. There are no three-star winners.

So are you curious about who the winners are? Unfortunately none are in Santa Clarita. The Michelin two-star restaurants in L.A. are:

- Urasawa on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills.
- Santa Monica's Melisse.
- Providence, on Melrose.
- And, Wolfgang Puck's Spago in Beverly Hills.

But Spago (Spah-go) isn't just in Beverly Hills. We have a bit of Spago right here at COC! Our own Cindy Schwanke was a pastry chef for Wolfgang Puck and designed desserts for the restaurant's legendary Academy Awards dinner. With her enthusiasm and passion, Cindy brings to mind an observation made by magazine editor Dylan Jones, who said, "Recipes don't work unless you use your heart." Cindy puts her full heart into everything she does, as evidenced at the chocolate and cheese tasting we experienced today. Let's thank Cindy and her team for sharing their heart – and such wonderful indulgences with us!

I wish Michelin would publish a guide to community colleges. Because if they did, I am confident we would win three stars. Why? Because we are experts at putting all the pieces together to create the finest educational experience possible for the students and community we serve.

- Menu
- Ingredients
- Atmosphere
- Service
- **And it leads to the best reputation any college could hope for.**

Let's start with our menu. It is like none other in its breadth, creativity, and innovation. It is many things. It's a lot like a good New York deli menu, a mix of the expected, and the unexpected, with something that appeals to every diner. Like most colleges, we offer courses in a traditional semester-length format. But those don't meet the needs of every student, so we've made a point of creating online classes, and rolling out accelerated programs that give students options of when, where, and how they learn.

We take the same approach with our degrees, certificates and program offerings. Many are common to community colleges, as salads, soups, and desserts are to most restaurant menus. But, as every high-rated restaurant has its signature dishes, some of our offerings are unique to College of the Canyons and distinguish us from the rest.

The Medical Lab Technician Training Program is a great example. We are the only college in our region training students to enter this growing field. We just graduated our first class of MLT students, and they will soon be followed by dozens more as we grow this burgeoning program.

The Fast Track Program is another offering unique to our menu. Students attend classes in a condensed, time-intensive format and get equipped with the skills that qualify them to work in advanced manufacturing and other growing industries. Many are hired just days after finishing a program. That's something truly special you don't find on any standard menu!

From GO, and PAL, to online classes, to First Year Experience, our college is rich with examples of expanding our menu beyond the traditional offerings to create unique learning opportunities for our students.

Cookbook author and TV host Bob Blumer said, “In the abstract art of cooking, ingredients trump appliances, passion supersedes expertise, creativity triumphs over technique, spontaneity inspires invention, and wine makes even the worst culinary disaster taste delicious.” **A menu is only as great as the quality and choice of its ingredients.** The best food demands the highest quality ingredients. In our case, the ingredients are your personality, resilience, creativity, spirit, flexibility, enthusiasm, commitment, ingenuity, organic approach and positive attitudes that infuse everything we do with the ultimate commitment to sustain what’s good and make it better.

Examples of your commitment to fresh original thinking abound at our college! Look no further than LEAP, our in-house leadership development program. It’s a great example of sustainability, as we cultivate our own leaders from within. Every class that comes through wows me with their creativity and innovative spirit. Together, the four classes have produced 31 different solution team proposals, most of which have been implemented and are making a real impact in what we can achieve as a college. What’s been added to our menu as a result of LEAP Projects?

- The Zone
- BIT – the Behavioral Intervention Team
- Field Studies
- Gardens of the Canyons
- Synergy
- Careers on the Go
- Idea Incubator
- GO Program
- Cougar Alumni Network
- Student Art Collection
- Cougar Dome Planetarium

One of the greatest benefits of LEAP is the way in which it brings people together to focus on common goals, broaden perspectives, and show them what is possible when the focus is on possibilities and what can be achieved together.

That cooperative spirit extends beyond the experience of LEAP and is evident in the everyday interactions you all have with your colleagues. Like the best chefs, **you** are willing to take chances with ingredients – mix it up, try new combinations, and be surprised by the results.

Marcel Boulestein, television's first chef, said, "Cookery is not chemistry. It is an art. It requires instinct and taste rather than exact measurements." That willingness to experiment is what leads to great recipes. A pinch of this. A dash of that.

The boldness to not just ask the question, "I wonder what would happen if we added this," but to actually answer it by following your instincts and dropping that unexpected ingredient into the pot. And, more importantly, you have the subsequent courage to put a spoonful to your lips and sample the result for yourself. It takes all of those steps to get it right. And that's what I love about working with all of you! You are not content with following the same old recipes. You are wildly imaginative and willing to blend ingredients together in new ways to create bold new entrees.

Take the Community Garden, for instance.

- The idea originated with folks in Student Health and Biology.
- It was quickly adopted by our Gardens Committee, which started as a LEAP project that cast a vision for developing a variety of gardens throughout both campuses. Its members include representatives from HR, Reprographics, Payroll, Theater Arts and the Foundation

- The Foundation came on board to secure the needed supplies and start-up costs.
- Facilities transformed a forgotten corner of the campus into a usable gardening space.
- Early Childhood Education committed to maintaining three plots and sharing the joy of gardening with their young students.
- Professional Development got involved when a staff member's son volunteered to build the planter boxes for his Eagle Scout project.
- Student clubs like Hands on Earth and SNAC adopted plots and recruited volunteers to help fill the planter boxes with soil and mulch.

Math 075 is another great example of using familiar ingredients to create something fresh and surprising.

- This was a brand new class that we offered just last spring. It prepares non-STEM, non-nursing and non-business students for statistics.
- Like analyzing a recipe, faculty dissected the two classes, took the most important concepts, and created an entirely new class.

- Rather than having students complete two developmental math courses, elementary and intermediate algebra, as a prerequisite for transfer-level statistics, Math 075 combines the two courses into one, thereby propelling students more quickly toward their goals.
- The course is a curriculum redesign of exploratory data analysis and algebra in an intellectually engaging and rigorous manner.
- Students are expected to communicate understanding of statistical concepts in both written and oral presentations.
- And they learn how to adopt the growth mindset, which believes everyone can learn if they apply themselves.
- This spring we saw a five-fold increase in student completion of statistics coursework (from 13% to 78%), for students with an elementary algebra placement.

Again, this class included standard ingredients that can be found in math classes at any community college. We took a chance in combining them differently, adding the psychology of learning, and achieved a real break-through in student success as a result.

We've talked about our menu, and our ingredients, so let's talk about service.

- Our menu grabs people's attention.

- It sparks curiosity, draws them in and lets them know that we're different.

But what keeps them here is our service.

- We've all been to restaurants that served great food, but had poor service.
- And we usually only go there once.
- Our students know they can count on College of the Canyons to deliver top-notch service, and that ensures they receive a 3-star educational experience that affects them for a long time. And it's why they keep coming back. In recent years, the fill rate in our classes has been well above 90 percent.

In a culinary setting that commitment to service is found in the front of house and back of house. In a restaurant, the front of house staff refers to those who interact directly with patrons – hostesses, servers, bartenders, busboys, wine stewards, sommelier, etc. The back of house staff are in the kitchen keeping things running smoothly behind the scenes – from the executive chefs all the way down to the dishwasher.

We have much the same delineation of responsibility in our college. This quality service comes from all directions. Our counselors, faculty members, program advisors and switchboard staff are perhaps our most recognizable front of house employees. But those of you involved with student services functions like admissions, financial aid, counseling, DSPS, international students, Career Services, the Health Center, the student business office, Re-Entry/Veterans, the Assessment Center, the TLC, CalWorks and EOPS also fall into this category.

No less important are those who may not be directly involved with our students, but who still play a critical role in enabling them to learn. What you do **behind the scenes** may sometimes go unnoticed by our students, but your work is critical to our ultimate success. Your professionalism and accuracy keep our computers running, help us order supplies, ensure we get our paychecks, hire our adult hourlies, design our publications, build the class schedule, and so much more

While those in the front of house and back of house play different roles in creating a top-notch 3-star education experience for our students, you are bound together by your commitment to serving our students and meeting their needs. Mario Batali said, "...Finding the happiness and finding the satisfaction and finding fulfillment in continuously

serving somebody else something good to eat is what makes a really good restaurant.” You do just that as you serve our students and demonstrate daily that you care for them, that you are here to inspire them, and as you ultimately help them to succeed.

Just like the menu, the ingredients and the service, another key component for a successful restaurant is ATMOSPHERE! We all enjoy visiting restaurants that are warm and inviting, that make us feel comfortable, and put us at ease.

- That certainly describes College of the Canyons.
- Everyone here works to foster an environment that is designed to bring out the best in our students.
- I always enjoy hearing from those who visit our campuses for the first time.
- Many have driven by along Rockwell or Valencia Boulevard, and they think they know the campus. But when they finally park and step out of their cars, they discover how much they don't know! They are surprised at how much more there is to our campus than meets the eye on a 50-mile-an-hour drive-by.

- At Canyon Country, they can't see what's at the top of the hill when they're flying down Sierra Highway. But when they turn into the driveway, and explore the interior of the campus, they find a quiet, peaceful campus with views of the rolling hills and surrounding sky.

Visitors to both campuses appreciate the design of the buildings and the layout of the space, and come to recognize that much planning and thought has gone into planning both Valencia and Canyon Country to maximize our capacity and our ability to serve students. And visitors are also taken with the beauty of the landscape. Our campuses are inspiring settings that demonstrate our standards of excellence. They send a message that our commitment to being the best extends to the smallest of details. That lets our students know that we take seriously our responsibility to help them achieve their success. Those of you involved in maintaining and enhancing our facilities should take pride in all that you accomplish. I know I do.

So what is the icing on the cake then? When a restaurant offers a dynamic menu, uses fresh ingredients, delivers exceptional service, and creates a welcoming atmosphere, it cultivates an outstanding reputation and the recognition that it is among the best at what it does.

- Restaurants and readers alike hold the Michelin guide in such high regard because of its longevity and uncompromising devotion to accuracy.
- The first edition of the guide debuted in 1900 and it is updated annually.
- Reviewers regularly visit the listed restaurants to ensure they remain worthy of their recognition.
- The reviewers are anonymous.
- They do not announce their presence during or after an inspection.
- They order from the menu, and they pay their bill as any other diner would.
- And they are not afraid to remove stars if a restaurant is found lacking.
- Reputation alone is not enough to maintain one's standing with Michelin.
- With recognition comes a demand for consistency. Aristotle said it best: "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

We may not have a Michelin guide, but as a public institution of higher learning, we are subject to myriad forms of scrutiny and evaluation.

- Accreditation.
- AARC reports.
- Audits.
- Fiscal checklists.
- And the list goes on and on.
- We prepare and file more reports and requirements than you could possibly imagine.

We are required to fulfill such regulatory requirements, and it is a responsibility that we take seriously. But all of us care more about what our community thinks of us. And thanks to our menu of offerings, ingredients, service and atmosphere, **we have earned a reputation in Santa Clarita that is second-to-none.** Everyone in town has a connection to College of the Canyons. Either they have attended here, or they know someone who has, be it their kids, their coworkers, their friends, or some other connection. That third party validation advances our credibility and reputation in the community.

Someone on campus shared a story with me recently that we can all relate to because we've all experienced something similar. He stopped at Wal-Mart to pick up a fishing license. That quick errand turned into a long conversation because he was wearing last year's Opening Day T-shirt. The clerk at Wal-Mart shared that both of his children attended COC and loved it. They discovered what they really wanted to pursue for their careers and went on to transfer to different four-year campuses to earn their bachelor's degrees. His appreciation for what we do was evident, as he couldn't say enough good things about the college. In N Out Burger's slogan says, "That's what a hamburger is all about." Well, for me, that story of the clerk at Wal-Mart is what we're all about.

Clearly, he gives College of the Canyons three stars. And so does John Cave, the president of Aerospace Dynamics International, a manufacturing company in the Valencia Industrial Center. Thanks to its 15-year training partnership with College of the Canyons, the company won its equivalent of Michelin stars this year. Boeing, which does business with more than 28,000 vendors, honored ADI with one its Suppliers of the Year award.

Another testament to our reputation are the alumni who make a point of staying involved and giving back to College of the Canyons. People like BJ Atkins, who helped us raise money for athletic expansion, and is now chairing our Santa Clarita Environmental Education Consortium. Or Jill Mellady, who chaired our Foundation Board and is now leading our Chancellor's Circle efforts. Or many of you – as nearly two-thirds of our employees are former students!

Clearly, we boast an outstanding reputation. Much like the Michelin guide, we have built that reputation over time with a quality and intensity of commitment rarely seen elsewhere.

- Our record of service to Santa Clarita spans more than four decades.
- In that time we have offered nearly 75,000 class sections and almost 300,000 students have attended the college.

But we cannot simply rest on our reputation. Just as the restaurants named in the Michelin guide must always be on top of their game and expect to be reviewed at any time, we too must press on in our commitment to innovation and creating new recipes for success regardless of the unpredictable external circumstances we might face. We must be resilient!

Celebrated travel writer Paul Theroux said, “Cooking requires confident guess work and improvisation, experimentation and substitutions, dealing with uncertainty and failure in a creative way.” In the culinary world, chefs are always contending with the unexpected. Late shipments or a bad harvest make key ingredients scarce. A recession forces people to spend less on eating out. Rent gets raised, driving costs up. Road construction restricts traffic in front of the restaurant. The scenarios for what can go wrong are almost unlimited. And yet, they find a way to get it done. They aren’t beaten by circumstances. Instead, they demonstrate resilience, the ability to bounce back and find a way through whatever they are facing.

I am proud to say that we do the same here. As I look ahead at the coming year, it is clear that we are a team that remains resilient in the face of adversity. Although we face external circumstances beyond our control, we are committed to expanding our menu. Here is just a taste of what’s new this year:

- We are opening the addition to the **Library** and doubling the capacity of the TLC.

- We will break ground on the construction of the new **Student Services/Administration Building**, which will concentrate all of Student Services in one location.
- We have submitted the preliminary and working drawings on the **Culinary Arts Building** as the capital campaign continues to build momentum.
- We will initiate an **Upward Bound** project at Golden Valley High School to prepare first-generation college students with the skills to succeed beyond high school.
- The first crops will be planted in our **Community Garden** this fall and we look forward to establishing an organic farm to support our Culinary Arts initiative.
- We will open the **Civil Rights Center** in partnership with the Department of Fair Employment and Housing and provide students with hands-on training on how to investigate and process work and housing discrimination claims.
- We will expand the **K-6 Science/Electronics Initiative** to more schools and promote increased awareness in science and technology through the creation and design of hands-on activities focused on Electronics and Physics.
- We will debut an exhibit of **Graphic Multimedia Design** student work at the Santa Clarita City Hall Gallery.

- We will build on the work of the **Sustainability Committee** and continue to raise funds for its environmental education and awareness at the K-12 level through the **Santa Clarita Environmental Education Consortium**.
- We'll expand **English 096**, which advances students through two freshman composition pre-requisites in one course, reducing the time students spend in developmental English by one semester.
- We will launch the **Institute of Law, Ethics, and Public Policy**.
- We will publish our updated **Education and Facilities Master Plan** that will guide our campuses' development, and point us toward establishing a third campus site, likely in the western portion of our service area.

It promises to be another year of innovation, excitement, and achievement at College of the Canyons as our menu, our ingredients, our service, our atmosphere and our reputation continue to expand and distinguish us from the rest. I look forward to seeing these dishes come to life, as well as those we haven't yet imagined!

Your commitment and your willingness to do what it takes enables us to create a three-star educational experience for our students and our community, who will remember their experiences at a top-notch institution. Together, we truly have a proven recipe for success! From the front of the house to the back of the house, you are an amazingly talented group of individuals and I count it a privilege and honor to work with each of you. Thank you for lending your talents to this amazing menu of all that we offer at College of the Canyons. We are what we are because of what you give of yourself. I appreciate your selflessness, your devotion to one another, and your Cougar spirit!

In closing, as we enter a new year, it's appropriate to share some wisdom from renowned chef Julia Child, who was born 100 years ago this year. She said: "This is my advice to people: Learn how to cook. Try new recipes. Learn from your mistakes. Be fearless, and above all, have fun!"

Thank you!