



# Kitchen confidence

Pappardelle, a wide, ribbon-like noodle, was served with a spring pomodoro sauce, fresh parsley and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese.

## Classes teach kids, adults how to make their own food

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

The survey results were a bit perplexing for the program director of Stockton Public Library.

When patrons were asked what classes they would want to participate in, the



SIERRA REED

No. 1 thing was “food and how to cook things,” Sierra Reed said.

The library has no kitchen.

Reed was contemplating

what she could do when she attended a Central Kansas Library System meeting in March 2025.

“The Osborne librarian was sitting beside me, and she said, ‘We have a Charlie Cart, and that’s how we do it at our library,’” Reed said. “I dived into it and found out how much it would cost and what it entailed. It is a very unique program that I absolutely adore, and I can’t wait for it to boil more here.”

The Charlie Cart Project, based in Berkeley, Calif., is designed to



Chef Christopher Hanson, of Fireline Bistro, shares noodle-making tips with members of a cooking class at the Stockton Public Library.

provide educators with needed kitchen equipment in a compact, rolling cart, as well as a curriculum that focuses on nutrition. The mobile kitchen was designed for use in schools and community facilities with the hope of getting more people cooking and eating healthy food.

“The Charlie Cart is meant to be the great-great-grandchild of the chuckwagon, making food education mobile and more convenient,” the organization’s website says.

With the help of libraries in Palco and Plainville, Reed set to work raising about \$15,500 through grants from the Dane G. Hansen Foundation, the Heartland Community Foundation

and Rooks County Farm Bureau, as well as donations from patrons and local businesses. In mid-December, the Charlie Cart arrived.

“It’s got everything including the kitchen sink,” she said. In addition to the stainless-steel sink which delivers water from a tank, a convection oven and induction cooktop can also be found in the cart’s storage cabinets, along with plentiful pots and pans, utensils, cutting mats, and other pieces of equipment for use by people learning to cook.

### IncrEDIBLE Chefs in Osborne

In Osborne, IncrEDIBLE Chefs classes for third through fifth graders were held on Monday afternoons from January

to March at the public library. Library Director Keri Thornton and Librarian Marian Gier made sure the kids learned a little something about various countries as they made cookies from around the world.

The young chefs took home samples of pizzelles from Italy, brigadeiros from Brazil, palmiers from France, Irish potato candy from Ireland and an American classic – Valentines Day sugar cookies.

“We have a lot of fun,” Thornton said. “It’s controlled chaos.”

One important lesson the kids learned while making cookies was to have a soft touch while measuring flour.

“When we measure flour, we dip it in gently,” Gier instructed. “We don’t pack it. We don’t tap it. Then you level it out.”

When the flour was added into the mixer, Gier made sure the mixer was not on high speed.

“If you did that, you guys would all look like me – with white hair,” she said.

The Osborne Public Library acquired its Charlie Cart in 2023, thanks to grant funding from the McFadden and Sarver charitable trusts, donations through the Greatness in Gratitude program at Peoples Bank and a SEED grant from the Kansas Department of Commerce. Last year’s class series taught the kids to make Meals on a Budget.

“What we were thinking about for next time is Science and Food,” Thornton said.

### Stockton classes are for all ages

Classes have begun at Stockton Public Library for both kids and adults. In March, classes were expected soon in Palco and Plainville. The cart is on wheels and is easily transported by trailer, Reed said.

“With the kids, we’re working



Osborne Public Librarian Marian Gier assists Lexi Oliver as Grayson Rietzke and Korbin Mans add sugar cookie ingredients to the mixer.

on measuring and those baking skills so they can help their parents out a little bit,” Reed said. They started with Johnny cakes.

For the adult classes, Reed recruited the assistance of professionals, including the former executive chef of the Smoky Hill Country Club in Hays.

Chef Christopher Hanson, who lives in Stockton, now owns Fireline Bistro. He offers personal chef services for private dinner parties, and he’s in the process of renovating a building and plans to open a restaurant in Stockton

next year. His full-time job is overseeing wildfire training for the Kansas Forest Service and leading firefighting crews in other states as needed.

“Food and fire pretty much go hand in hand – especially in wildland fire,” he said. “Last year I was with my crew up in Alaska. There were just 12 of us on one side of the fire, and we were making breakfast, lunch and dinner for 21 days.”

### Preparing pasta

On a Wednesday evening in March, Hanson was at the library demonstrating how to turn flour, eggs and salt into pasta noodles for a class of 10 from Stockton and Damar.

Previously, he had shown them how to make sauce and roux, a mixture of flour and butter used to thicken sauces and soups.

Hanson stood behind the Charlie Cart and utilized equipment from its drawers to prepare samples of pappardelle, a wide,

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Making sugar cookies at the Osborne Public Library were Lexi Oliver, Carson Mans, Karter Mans, Grayson Rietzke, Korbin Mans, Peter Choate and Kruze Oliver.

**THE CHARLIE  
CART PROJECT**



Chef Christopher Hanson, of Fireline Bistro, adds eggs to flour as he prepares to make noodles on a Charlie Cart in the Stockton Public Library.

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ribbon-like noodle, which he served with a spring pomodoro sauce, fresh parsley and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. Participants in the class, many of whom had already tried making pasta themselves, got a taste.

“My mom always used to make homemade noodles and have noodles drying everywhere,” said class member Sharon Pettijohn, of Stockton. “It’s a lot of work. I’ve tried. I’m not the best. I’m hoping this helps.”

Janese Townley, of Stockton, said she’d previously tried making spaghetti with a hand crank and wasn’t entirely pleased with the results.

“I just wanted to learn more about making pasta, and I learned a lot,” she said. “We’re going to be better chefs.”

Hanson said making pasta makes him think of his grandmother, who taught him how to make it.

“Spaghetti in particular – making it fresh – has a special place because it was the last meal my grandma asked me to make her,” he said. “Enjoy the time with your family – especially around meals – and take the time to share stuff like this with others because it does make a difference.”

Hanson said he wants people to leave his classes being able to replicate what they’ve learned and refine it to their families’ liking.

“In the world we live in now with the high pace of everything, every meal we make is not a fresh

homemade meal. Logistics and time and life just don’t allow for that all the time,” Hanson said. “But when they do, it’s good to be able to have those basic foundations and skill sets.”

**The do’s and don’ts**

Hanson offered several pasta-making tips:

- Knead for about 15 minutes after the dough is formed. “You gotta have some pasta muscles – or a stand mixer with a dough hook,” he said.
- Cover the dough and let it rest after kneading for at least 2 ½ hours. Overnight is better.
- Roll the dough out thin and cut the noodles evenly. Work quickly and don’t overwork the dough. That causes the gluten to seize back up.
- Salting the water helps flavor your pasta. “If you want dead, droopy, nasty pasta just don’t salt your water. It’s cool. That’s a you thing,” he said.
- Cook two to four minutes to al dente. Taste a noodle to see if it is to your liking. Don’t make your pasta wait on the sauce. Have the sauce ready to go.

Although Hanson made pasta dough during the class, he pulled out a ball of dough he’d prepared and rested beforehand when he got ready to cut the noodles.

“I’ve been stressed with work and running state training and state operations,” he said. “When I’m rolling out pasta, all that stress goes away.” ■

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donated where students can tend cow-calf pairs and apply their artificial insemination skills. He’s had communications with a meat processor looking at building a facility near Palco. There, students and community members would be able to learn to butcher various livestock. Hamel’s hope is that the majority of food served at the school will soon be produced onsite.

“I think it’s important that our kids know where everything they’re eating comes from,” he said.

Junior high teacher Jennifer Guffey has embraced the new focus. Not only does she teach history, but she teaches fiber arts and an ag class. Her students made and sold soap and used the proceeds to purchase leatherworking tools.

“I was taught the old lady hobbies. I can embroider and cross stitch and quilt, but I can also get out there and brand and tag and give shots,” she said. “I want the kids to be interested in something. I will look until I find it.”

**Time, talent and treasure**

On Dec. 3, the high school gym was full of patrons who were outbidding each other to own one of several stout benches or cornhole games students built in the Ag Projects class. Before auctioneer Brandon Hamel got to work raising almost \$20,000, the officer team of the Future Farmers of America, in their new FFA jackets.

FFA members thanked their parents and presented them with poinsettias and jars of school-made jam.

“My youngest child graduated two years ago, and when she was leaving the FFA program, she was feeling rather sad that there weren’t enough people to take their place as officers,” said kindergarten teacher Larisa Roy. “To be there and see all the blue jackets – a full officer slate and even more kids – that was good to see.”

Hamel said another thing that will make a comeback next year is