

DESERET Morning News

Prison culinary students win top prizes with castle

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Salt Lake Community College students at the Utah State Prison tilted their chef hats last month when they took both best in show and first-place awards for their gingerbread castle.

The culinary arts program at the Draper correctional facility includes 40 female students, all working toward an associate degree in hospitality and culinary arts. Four of the past six years that the group has submitted an entry for the contest, they've taken top honors, and this year's entry was no exception.

With 16 sparkling towers, a giant overwhelming dragon, frosted trees, sugar moat, scrumptious stairs, marshmallow swords and a drawbridge complete with a frosting knight, the completely edible masterpiece took about a month to complete, said Rico Renzetti, SLCC's Culinary Arts program coordinator.

"Those who have participated in this project always look back on something wonderfully beneficial that they have done," he said. "It's a perfect way for them to really contribute in a positive way to society."

Following the judging of more than 200 entries, the pieces were auctioned off and the money raised went to charity. SLCC's castle earned nearly \$800 for a local at-risk youth group.

"This program does great things for their self-esteem," Renzetti said. The imprisoned students, he said, look forward to using the knowledge they learn in the program when they are released from prison.

The gingerbread contest was part of the Continental Cuisine course taught at the prison. The class is asked to explore creative ways of putting together showpieces such as the gingerbread castle, and other display or centerpiece work that is made entirely of food.

"We're in the realm of edible art," Renzetti said.

The program, which is one of two involving culinary arts at the prison, inspires participants to make and keep their lives productive. The path to an associate degree is the exact same for correctional students as for students on campus at SLCC, having the same requirements and reading materials. Because of security and other logistical issues, the correctional program takes longer to complete.

Renzetti said he feels the college is proud of its correctional program participants and the many awards they garner remain on display at the Redwood Road campus.

"That's the crux of it — being involved gives them purpose and meaning in their life," he said. The contest was sponsored by the Beehive State Chefs Association and was held in November at Thanksgiving Point in Lehi.

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The gingerbread castle created by culinary arts students in prison tops food top awards in Beehive State Chefs Association contest. (Handout Photo)