

Students of Color Luncheon



Chef Earl Frederick has cooked elegant meals for discriminating diners—from a former president to Club Med movers and shakers.

But the Clark Cuisine instructor's roots started with humble, downhome cooking. As a boy, he learned to cook alongside his grandmother, Susie Lovely Lewis in her kitchen in small town Ellenville in upstate New York.

Chef Earl shared his story—and his delicious food—with Clark students, faculty, and staff at the Winter Student of Color Luncheon on February 6. The free event is presented each term by Clark's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Multicultural Student Affairs. It provides opportunities for students to be encouraged by inspiring stories, meet faculty and new friends, consider different career paths, and identify community resources and potential mentors.

Chef Earl designed the luncheon menu to represent Black History Month—with a nod to his beloved grandmother and her specialties: fried chicken, collard greens, cornbread, and red velvet cupcakes. To that, he added some of his favorites, including pork loin and Jambalaya with Cajun sausage.

The delicious meal was prepared by Clark's Cuisine students under the watchful eye of Chef Earl, who emphasizes cooking from scratch with no shortcuts. His students smoked pork loin and made Cajun sausage.

Cooking with grandmother

While appreciative Clark diners savored the meal, Chef Earl shared family photos and told his story. A child of separated parents, he divided his time between the big city of Yonkers,

New York, and small-town Ellenville. Family is important to Chef Earl. His grandmother had 13 siblings, so he was surrounded by aunts, uncles, and cousins.

One uncle got him interested in sports, encouraged him to play basketball, and got him to consider college. Another uncle modeled growing your own food and being sustainable.

Because his father was a preacher, he says he grew up in the church. "I'm a preacher's kid," he said. "Church wasn't just Sunday for me. It was every day—and all day on Sunday."

In the church kitchen, he helped his grandmother prepare meals for the congregation.

He said, "At one point, I realized I was the only boy helping in the kitchen."

But he didn't care. He liked to cook. And he was good at it.

He shared an old photo of the church choir of his youth. He said, "All of those people never made it past sixth grade. On her deathbed, my grandmother told me to get an education. No one could take it away from me."

He did follow his grandmother's advice to get an education, but his educational journey included bumps in the road and detours.

Navigating rough patches

When he was in high school, like many teens, he made some choices that did not please his family, particularly his beloved grandmother. Eventually, he was missing so many credits that he would not be able to graduate with his class.

He was introduced to the local alternative school and told: "Either you don't graduate, or you go here."

So, he enrolled in Ulster BOCES (Board of Cooperative

Educational Services) Career & Technical Center. One of the selling points was its culinary program.

“This place saved my life,” Chef Earl said.

Chef Earl holds a baking and pastry diploma from Oregon Culinary Institute, a certificate in hospitality administration from University of Hawaii at Manoa, an associate degree in culinary arts from Johnson & Wales University, and a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Warner Pacific University. He also is a certified American Culinary Federation executive chef.

After graduating from Johnson & Wales University at age 19, his first job was working in the kitchens at Walt Disney World. Throughout his career, Chef Earl has worked in kitchens in Intel, Club Med, and Nike, and taught culinary skills to Job Corps students and The Portland Kitchen, an after-school culinary and job skills program.

Paying it forward

Chef Earl has volunteered his expertise to many nonprofits focused on food, including serving on the board of directors for Vancouver Farmers Market.

In 2017, Chef Earl returned to the alternative school where he entered the pathway to become Chef Earl. He visited the culinary arts classroom, shared his expertise, and led a food preparation demonstration. It was a full-circle experience for him. He advised students to never destroy relationships they could benefit from later. [Read about his visit here.](#)

In 2022 he was named a NextLevel Postsecondary CTE Leadership Fellow through the Association for Career and Technical Education.

Chef Earl has been teaching Cuisine students at Clark College since 2016. What he enjoys the most about teaching at Clark is

“engaging with the students. I also enjoy when they come back and visit and tell me how successful they are!”

His grandmother would be proud of his achievements.

Most memorable meal

Although he has prepared countless delicious meals, one of the most memorable was when he was a chef at Club Med Crested Butte, a ski resort in Colorado.

“I had the opportunity to cook for former President Jimmy Carter, then with the Carter Foundation. I made Duck à l’Orange, a classic French dish,” he said. “I still remember that day. Jimmy Carter told me it was the best he’d ever tasted!”

Chef Earl’s words of wisdom



- “Food is my life. Bringing people together. Breaking bread together. Community.”
- “When I was young, I went through a time when I was getting into trouble. My grandmother said, ‘You represent my name. Don’t put any bad ju-ju out there with my name.’”
- “On her deathbed, my grandmother told me to get an education. No one can take that away from you.”
- “I’m a preacher’s kid. Church wasn’t just on Sunday for me.”
- “There’s nothing you can do about the past, but you can change the future.”
- “Never burn bridges because you never know if you need to cross them again.”
- “Don’t just talk about it. Be about it.”

Advice to students

“Building relationships is important. You never know how that person can help you in the future.”

“Be persistent. I applied for more than 150 scholarships in the days before the internet. I applied for many scholarships where I thought I wouldn’t have a chance to get it—but I got it because I was the only student who applied. I got 53 scholarships. I applied for this teaching job at Clark College three times before I was hired. Don’t give up.”

Fun Facts about Chef Earl

- He writes and performs spoken word poetry
- Favorite spoken-word poet: Earl Simmons aka DMX
- Favorite dish to make: Jamaican curried oxtail with rice and peas
- Favorite food to eat: New York pizza or fresh pasta
- Favorite restaurant: Cochon in New Orleans, LA
- Go-to comfort food: Cast-iron fried chicken, braised collard greens, rice and cornbread

Photos: Clark College/Susan Parrish