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Serving More Than Sandwiches at the Huckleberry Cafe

By Cathy Tyson



Trainee Dina Greenburg, working in the Huckleberry kitchen Photo Cathy Tyson

"The curried chicken salad sandwich is very popular, also the turkey, avocado and bacon. Our brownies are delicious - very chocolatey and chewy," said Jacquie Allen, Program Director of the Huckleberry Cafe-To-Go. Although the food is terrific, this small business actually focuses on training the staff. "I am just so proud of the clients. We have between ten and fifteen clients working in the kitchen - a great crew."

Dina Greenburg, pictured above, is a trainee in the kitchen; she says that she loves working there and it has helped her with her cooking skills at home. She considers it her job and is happy to receive a pay check while being trained.

"Without a generous outpouring of public support from the Lafayette Juniors, the Lafayette Community Foundation and many, many others none of this would have been possible," said Allen, referring to the recently opened catering kitchen. It took over a year to get the kitchen installed, due to sanitation regulations and other requirements in the Future's Explored building just behind Chow on Wilkinson Lane.

Only open since December of 2008, the Huckleberry Cafe-To-Go provides valuable vocational training as well as food safety, sanitation and food service skills. It's the only commercial kitchen in the area that is staffed by developmentally disabled adults. With an emphasis on fresh, healthy ingredients it's easy to see why their products are so popular. The group provides lunch four days a week to the students of the Meher School in Lafayette and delivers lunches to some offices in the area.

Futures Explored, a private non-profit day program also provides supported employment, helping clients get and hold paying jobs. They have a job developer and job coaches to provide support - some of the clients work at Safeway and Round Table.

In addition to the Huckleberry Cafe-To-Go, Futures Explored runs the Nifty Thrift Shop on Golden Gate Way in Lafayette, also a vocational training site for adults with developmental disabilities.

Program Director Jacquie Allen is no stranger to catering and food service, she had previously worked at Las Trampas, where she supervised clients that prepared and sold baked goods at the BART station. The Huckleberry Cafe is the manifestation of her vision of a meaningful life for all. She feels many people with disabilities want to work and earn a paycheck, as we all do. "I have been in the field for almost thirty years and it still makes me happy when I see someone master a skill or hold down a job out in the community. Huckleberry Cafe-To-Go is just another way to help people achieve their dreams."

Go to www.futures-explored.org and click on Huckleberry Cafe to find a menu and ordering information, or call (925) 284-3240 x224 for Jacquie Allen.

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