

## TRENDS

# Nothing to Be Afraid Of; It's Just a Sauté Pan

## Cooking Experts See a Market in Beginners

By SANA SIWOLOP

**L**ESTER MCGUIRE and 18 other students had just watched Ronnie Marmor slice and dice an onion as the first step toward making a minestrone.

After following suit with carrots, celery and garlic, Ms. Marmor steered them to their own cutting boards. Mr. McGuire, a high-school computer instructor from South Salem, took to the task gingerly. He sometimes fries an egg for dinner, but this was the first onion he had ever cut.

Cooking classes usually assume a certain amount of knowledge: to learn how to make tapas, for instance, you need to be a little further along than Mr. McGuire.

But Ms. Marmor is one of a growing number of cooking experts attuned to the potential market that novices like him represent. Beginners are motivated to learn, too, it turns out. When dinner night after night consists of takeout food, resuscitated Lipton soup mix or chicken pieces slapped onto a George Foreman grill, it can become important to learn the difference between a chef's knife and a paring knife, or between sautéing vegetables and blanching them.

Chef Central, the kitchenware store in Hartsdale, has recently increased its beginner offerings, according to a spokesman; it now offers at least three basic courses a month. MacMenamin's Grill & Chefworks, a restaurant and cooking-school complex in New Rochelle, has been teaching beginners for three years but recently added classes.

And this fall, the Institute of Culinary Education in Manhattan plans to offer three sessions of a class it calls "Cooking 101." A flier for the class says it is aimed at "absolute beginners" who want to learn a small repertory of dishes that they can prepare daily, like tomato and mozzarella salad and melon with prosciutto.

Ms. Marmor, a trained chef who is based in Armonk, has big plans, too. She is now teaching three basic cooking classes privately, and in mid-September she began teaching a three-weeklong basic cooking session at Westchester Community College in Valhalla. Over the next academic year, she plans to teach similar classes at the continuing education programs in Chappaqua and in Greenwich, Conn.

During the first class of the cooking ses-



sion at Westchester Community College, Ms. Marmor's goal was to teach students of all ages a variety of basic cooking skills while preparing a relatively straightforward dinner: minestrone, salad with vinaigrette, grilled chicken and roasted asparagus and potatoes; dessert was strawberries dipped in chocolate.

The students were intrigued if a bit apprehensive. Caryn Silverman of Yorktown Heights said she had recently changed her work schedule as chief financial officer of a Connecticut investment company so that she could be home in time to cook dinner for her family. Her problem now is that she doesn't know how to cook.

"Spaghetti with butter is not a meal," Ms. Silverman said, adding that while she usually prepares frozen items like chicken nuggets for her two children, she and her husband either stick to large restaurant lunches or grab a bowl of cereal when they get home. Carolyn DeSalvo of Yonkers said she didn't know how to cook, either, because her mother had always taken care of it. Christine Crawford of Tarrytown said she and her newlywed husband, Kiowa, live on a street where takeout food, from Italy, Mexico, Portugal and Greece, is readily avail-



Photographs by Alan Zale for The New York Times

Ronnie Marmor, left, instructs Carolyn DeSalvo in a cooking class at Westchester Community College, where onion chopping and other basic skills are taught. Left, Caryn Silverman prepares a plate in class.



companions than on the recipe. At one point during the session, she told her students to touch the tips of their noses so that they would know what a well-done piece of meat should feel like.

Brian MacMenamin, owner and executive chef of MacMenamin's in New Rochelle, said his original motivation for teaching the basics had grown out of going to various dinner parties and being "personally shocked" at how uncomfortable many people seemed to be in the kitchen.

"I've been to people's houses where they are so uptight about even putting together a simple dinner for four that no one wants to be around them," he said. His school now of-

fers cooking "boot camps" for children, as well as a once-a-month session called "How to Boil Water and Other Kitchen Mysteries." A few months ago, it also began to offer a "Dinner by Design" class, which allows students to walk away, in just three hours, with four ready-to-go dinners like beef stroganoff and chicken with mushrooms.

After just one hour in Ms. Marmor's class, Mr. McGuire was julienning vegetables with ease. Still, there were a few mishaps. "Can we get some chicken help?" yelled one group. They had been trying — with little success but plenty of smoke — to brown chicken breasts on a stove-top grill.

At the end of class, the students had a chance to taste their wares. Ms. Crawford, the newlywed from Tarrytown, took a plate of food and walked over to her husband.

"You know, he can make all of three things," she told an onlooker.

"I make a really good reservation," her husband replied.

able. "Someday I'd love to be able to have a house where we can entertain," she said.

Ms. Marmor tries to keep her menus and her kitchen tips simple, so that cooks can spend more time focusing on their dining