Upper Bucks tech school food truck offers fries with education

Dylan Brad, Palisades senior, serves up hand-cut fries tossed in sea salt. (Photo by Dana Beck) –

Upper Bucks County Technical School is offering culinary students a chance to hit the road – in a food truck. From food safety, creating menus, ordering inventory, stocking, cooking, serving, handling payments and cleaning up, culinary arts and baking juniors and seniors are responsible for the Feed Our Future food truck, which catered its first event September 27.

“The atmosphere and learning from the food truck is teaching me all aspects of the restaurant [business]. It’s a microcosm,” said Tim Weingartner, 17, a Palisades senior from Springfield Township.

High school Career and Technical Program students from Palisades, Pennridge and Quakertown Community school districts attend UBCTS in Bedminster Township. Alex Michaels, president and CEO of Discover Lehigh Valley, said food trucks are big business with about 4,000 registered nationwide and annual sales of $1.2 billion. While trendy about five years ago, Michaels said food trucks, especially those that specialize in a particular culture’s cuisine or a food item like BBQ or tacos, have widespread appeal.

“They are still a viable avenue for mobility and to reach a broader audience, and I think we’re more accustomed to seeing food trucks,” Michaels said. He noted popular food truck festivals at Cocoa Cola Park and ArtsQuest continue to fuel tourism in the Lehigh Valley. They’re also a low-impact way to begin a food business career.

“[Food trucks are] a great way for an entrepreneur to get launched, and create some awareness of the business,” he said.
Food trucks are also a lower-cost way to start a restaurant business because the upfront investment is less than a traditional restaurant build-out. Helping to develop restaurant entrepreneurs is one of the reasons area businesses are supporting the UBCTS project.

“[We] found the food truck to be an interesting project to give students an opportunity to learn about business from a hands-on perspective,” said Dave Nagy, director of marketing and IT management at Wehrung’s Lumber and Home Center in Ottsville. Working the food truck prepares students in every aspect of the restaurant business, said Amber Ott, UBCTS food service manager. “From cost control and inventory management to prepping and pack out, which means getting everything together and loaded into the truck for the day’s event, to cooking using the commissary (where the food is prepped),” Ott said.

Students rotate through each of the “stations” on the truck, so they have experience in all facets of running a business.

Price points are affordable “so $10 goes a long way,” Ott said. Feed Our Future dishes include chili – a house recipe of Ott’s — Zingy Wingy meatballs with buffalo hot sauce and ranch sauce and the “Grilly Philly,” a UBCTS take on a cheese steak. It’s grilled cheese with American and provolone cheeses available with or without onions on a Pullman roll. The signature dish is hand-cut French fries. They’re boiled in vinegar, chilled, individually quick-frozen and fried to order on the truck.

“There’s a science behind them,” Ott said. Other programs at the school, from automotive to electrical to graphic design, have been involved in outfitting the truck for service, providing those students with practical experience, too.

Feed Our Future students are paid from a Bucks County Workforce Development grant program, Ott said.

School officials are banking on spreading the word and creating business connections for Feed Our Future and its student employees as it is hired to appear at events throughout Upper Bucks County.

“We can’t wait to see the impact this will have on students, and the region,” said Kristen Murphy, Penn Community Bank branch manager in Perkasie.