

FOOD BIZ Mary Rose's kitchen

by Gabriella Moretti

Mary Rose Hoover looks as though she's in her own kitchen. Wearing an apron, she's preparing ingredients, getting dishes and mixing bowls ready, and chopping vegetables while waiting for her guests to arrive. On the menu this afternoon is ricotta cavatelli with Gorgonzola sauce, potato gnocchi with eggplant and tomato sauce, fusilli-pasta and ravioli with butter and sage.

Watching Hoover move about, you forget that you're in a stylish kitchen showroom of McCauley Design Kitchens, Tile and Stone at 211 Park Ave. in Barrington. That's where Hoover operates her own business, Cucina Della Rosa, which offers cooking lessons for adults and children on various styles of Italian food.

She is not a formally trained chef and doesn't position herself as a culinary expert. "This is just a passion for me," she says. Born Maria Rosaria Cirelli, a first-generation Italian American, Hoover enjoys sharing the Old World recipes and techniques that she learned from her southern Italian mother, Margherita and her aunts. Her mother came to the United States from Verbicaro, a mountain town near the resort town of Scalea in Cosenza. Her father was born in Oakland, Calif., but his family returned to Calabria when he was a child.

"I look at teaching cooking not only as a lesson in how to make pasta but how to create traditions, carry them on, bring families together more often, give people confidence to try new things," says Hoover. "But most of all, I want people to discover a way to have fun, enjoy life and create the urge to share it with family and friends."

Hoover also has plenty of professional experience to draw from. After her husband, Bob, was transferred to the Chicago area, Hoover became the

wine, beer and spirits buyer for Sam's Club. She has also worked at Trader Joe's writing recipes and overseeing cooking demonstrations, and has taught cooking classes at Williams-Sonoma.

The idea to start her own cooking school came from entertaining friends who marveled at everything that Hoover made. "We have friends who are very American, and we had them over a lot and I showed their kids how to make pasta, I introduced them to bell peppers to just eating better," says Hoover.

Eating healthier is a large component of



You don't have to be an Italian to cook like one, thanks to Cucina Della Rosa.

Hoover's cooking classes, as well as learning how to shop for fresh produce, herbs and ingredients. "These are green peppers that I just got at Caputo's," she says holding up a green pepper before four women who booked an afternoon pasta-making class. She soon pulls out a bunch of red dried peppers to demonstrate how she took the fresh green peppers, strung them together and dried them.

The class makes its way to an adjacent kitchen for olive oil tasting. "I just want you all to find what it is you like," she says. Everyone takes a little piece of bread to dip in one of five brands Hoover has selected. Throughout the pasta-making portion of the class, Hoover demonstrates different techniques, and shares where to find the best ravioli cutter, cheese grater and mixing bowls.

There are stations for the different types of pastas on the menu, with participants rotating around the stations. "I like this because it's hands on," says Mary Burke, one of the students in Hoover's class. "There's a variety and it's not yuppie food — it's food that people would actually eat," adds Shelly Costello another student.

In addition to pasta, students learn how to make three kinds of sauces and when everything is cooked, everyone gets to sample what they've spent all afternoon learning how to do. Some even get to take home some of the leftover dough and sauce to see if they can replicate what they have learned at home.

Other classes offered by Cucina Della Rosa are grilling Italian style, Italian desserts, cheese making and there are summer camps for children. Average cost is \$65 per student. For details, call 847-650-9463 or visit www.cookingclassesatcdr.com.