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CCA partners with Escoffier for intensive French cuisine course

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THE INFLUENCE of Auguste Escoffier, once hailed the "king of chefs and the chef of kings" can now be tasted in the Philippines, thanks to a partnership between the Center for Culinary Arts Manila (CCA) and the Institut Culinaire Disciples Escoffier (ICDE) of Hong Kong.

Auguste Escoffier died in the earlier part of the 20th century, leaving behind him the important legacy of standardizing the recipes of French haute cuisine, as well as establishing the ranking of chefs in a kitchen. Meanwhile, the organization Disciples Escoffier, now an organized network of over 25,000 chefs and epicureans worldwide, was founded in 1954. It has a presence in Asia in eight countries, namely, in China, Hong Kong, Macau, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam. The ICDE is directly affiliated with Disciples Escoffier International Asia, and by association, to the worldwide network.

The partnership between CCA and ICDE resulted in the establishment of an intensive 540-hour course where students will graduate with a Disciples Escoffier Diploma in Culinary Arts. In addition to that, ICDE Chief Operating Officer Benjamin Grenier said, "They're going to have a French government diploma. This... is basically the equivalent of what professional chefs in France have."

As well, the Escoffier program might open access (but not membership) to the extensive Disciples Escoffier network. "We will happily give a call to... chefs around the world... if they (the students) are hard working and motivated enough," said Mr. Grenier during an interview at the sidelines of a Jan. 19 press conference.

The course will focus on classic French cuisine, and will be taught at CCA's new campus in Makati later this year. Four more campuses are slated to open this year: in Cagayan de Oro, Intramuros, Pampanga, Bonifacio Global City, and Intramuros.

"It's a little bit straightforward cooking... it's a little bit strenuous," said Melissa Oreta, Program Director for CCA. She added, "Our prerequisite is they should [be] at least 21 years old, and they should have at least a two-year degree."

Added Mr. Grenier, "We don't want to teach 18-year-olds. We want our students to be very motivated; to know why they're here."

The Cravings Group, which includes CCA, has forged many international partnerships over the years, including one with the American Culinary Federation, and Di Bella Coffee from Australia, among others. Said Ms. Oreta, "CCA is... 100% Filipino-owned. We don't have any grants or financing from any foreign partners... so... for us to compete globally, and to be recognized elsewhere, we need partnerships with global names... which shows the quality of the programs that we have."

According to her, CCA is also eyeing a partnership with another European school.

The Cravings Group plans to open three more restaurants this year, namely Rice Line (focusing on Southeast Asian cuisine), Madame Ginger (Thai cuisine), and Rolled, an Australian franchise.

"Cooking, for French people, it's about giving pleasure to people. It's not [just] about feeding people," said Mr. Grenier, speaking on the continuing influence of French cuisine in the world, despite the newfound fame of many other cuisines. He then pointed out a quote by Auguste Escoffier on the back of his card: "Good cooking is the foundation of genuine happiness." -- **Joseph L. Garcia**

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