



There's No Taste Like Home

Unique event lets UGA students savor the *taste of home*

LIKE MOST COLLEGE STUDENTS, University of Georgia sophomore Eric DePopas of Greensboro, North Carolina, misses his mom's cooking, especially her Crescent Lasagna. One day last December, his friends had a chance to taste the cheesy casserole of ground beef, sausage, and tomato sauce layered between flaky pastry; but they didn't have to make the 575-mile round-trip from Athens to Greensboro to savor this taste of home. It was served for dinner at Oglethorpe Dining Commons, one of the University's four dining halls. Eric's mom, Beth DePopas, was among 125 parents honored at the University of Georgia's A Taste of Home.

The annual event is the brainchild of J. Michael Floyd, director of food services at the University of Georgia. Each year, he invites the parents of more than 8,100 UGA undergraduates to share a recipe for one of their child's favorite foods. Then he and his staff sort through the submissions (more than 850 in last year's event), choosing their favorites and devising menus for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. On the day before classes end for the fall semester, all four dining halls feature students' favorite recipes from home.

For the parents, there's the pride of being selected a winner. Besides commemorative plates that read, "Presented

BY BETTY TERRY / FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY BY MAC JAMIESON



in Appreciation of a Special Recipe for A Taste of Home," these parents also receive a copy of their recipe, scaled up to feed 8,000, suitable for framing.

For many Bulldog parents, A Taste of Home has become an annual event. Laura Bennewitz of Watkinsville, Georgia, has won four times, once for each year her son, Tom, has attended the University. Robin Royal and her husband, Randy, of Hendersonville, North Carolina, have turned A Taste of Home into a family competition. Randy has won twice since their son, Ryan, entered the University of Georgia, and Robin has won once. Ryan will be a senior this fall, so 2007 will be Robin's last chance to even the score. "The competition is going to be hot this fall," she says.

For Mike Floyd, the benefit is twofold. "It's a great way to touch our students," he explains. "We want the University of Georgia to seem like home."



And, he points out, the Taste of Home event helps him discover new recipes to add to his repertoire. Many winners from past years, such as Poppy Seed Chicken and Mike's personal all-time favorite, Eclair Squares, have found a place on the food service's regular menu.

A Taste of Home is just one innovation that Mike Floyd has introduced during his 21-year career at the University of Georgia. His award-winning food-service operation caters to the



UGA Director of Food Services Michael Floyd presents a commemorative plate to one of last year's Taste of Home winners.

"It's time to let the Big Dawg eat."



needs of students and faculty and has earned the praise of both. Each day, it offers a variety of dining options, from a 54-item salad bar and cooked-to-order stir-frys to breakfast served anytime. There's even an Eating Smart Course, taught by registered dietitians, to help students develop a healthy lifestyle.

"My son loves it, loves it," says Beth DePopas about the UGA Food Service. "He's kind of a health nut, and they have very healthy food choices. And the students get to eat as much as they want."

Most college food-service programs require students to purchase a minimum meal plan, but the University of Georgia's program is completely voluntary. Last fall, Mike points out, he had

118 percent participation. That means that more than 1,800 students who live *off campus* chose to buy a meal plan to eat *on campus*.

"I like to walk the dining commons every day," Mike says. "I try to talk to at least 20 customers." His presence creates a bond with the students, he believes. "I think they'll tell me when things aren't right."

With another school year beginning, Mike Floyd and his staff are gearing up for the 2007 A Taste of Home event. The deadline for entries is October 18, and the winners will be featured on the menus of the University's dining halls on December 5, 2007. So, University of Georgia parents, get ready. As they say in Athens, "It's time to let the Big Dawg eat." ■