



New Dereham cookery school has a touch of spice

By VICTORIA LEGGETT [<mailto:victoria.leggett@archant.co.uk>] Monday, February 28, 2011

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A new Indian cookery school launched in a converted Norfolk barn this weekend already has at least 50 people signed for classes.

Hidden down a country lane in the middle of Norfolk, the barns at Mowles Manor are not the obvious setting for an Indian cookery school.

But on Saturday a newly transformed building at Etling Green, near Dereham, was filled with the smell of authentic Eastern cuisine and hosts in stunning traditional dress.

And the launch of the Ethnic Fusion School of Indian Cookery proved food-lovers were willing to travel across the county for the lessons with at least 50 people already signed up for courses.

Madhu Choudhry has transformed one of the units at Mowles Manor Enterprise Park into a demonstration and teaching room.

The former barn now houses four cooking areas complete with hob, equipment and their own jars of spices lined up in front of the work spaces.

A further demonstration area with its own hob and sink is surrounded by chairs for pupils to watch as the trained chef shows how to make a lamb rogan josh or onion bhaji.

Following Saturday's launch, which was attended by Dereham mayor Robert Hambidge, Mrs Choudhry has just two weeks until her first beginners' workshop on March 12.

But the businesswoman, who continues to run her catering company Ethnic Fusion from another one of the barns, said she was not too worried.

The 58-year-old former research scientist said: "You are always nervous about new things but I'm not one who keeps practising and practising - it just needs to come on the day. If you know what you are saying, it should come out alright."

Between now and the end of May, Mrs Choudhry has 17 workshops - a mixture of beginners, experienced, vegetarian and Indian snacks - two four-week demonstration courses, and eight demonstration-and-dine evenings scheduled.

Her husband Rup, who is actively involved in the business, said his wife had worked incredibly hard since first applying for planning permission last September.

And he believed it was already paying off with 50 signed up for courses before the school was even launched.

He added: "A lot of existing customers have been saying 'when is it happening?' They have been pushing us."

Mr Choudhry said he hoped the cookery school would introduce people from across Norfolk and Suffolk to Indian food.

He added: "My wife is extremely passionate about cooking and from there she wanted to teach people. She's done very well."

With the expansion of her business, Mrs Choudhry, who moved to England from India in 1973, has taken on additional staff and now employs three part-time workers. She also plans to take on another two people to help her prepare for the courses and share some of the workload of her catering company.



Bringing Indian cuisine to Norfolk kitchens

By VICTORIA LEGGETT

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A trained chef is hoping to share the secrets of Indian cuisine with plans to open a cookery school in a converted Norfolk barn.

Since Madhu Choudhry opened her catering company, Ethnic Fusion, in Etling Green, near Dereham, four years ago she has been inundated with requests from people wanting to learn to cook like she does.

The catering business, based at Mowles Manor Barns, has been a huge success with Mrs Choudhry providing food for weddings, parties and private dinners as well as snacks for the University of East Anglia.

The regular Creake Abbey Farmers' Market stallholder said: "It's kept me busy but the most enjoyment I get is teaching."

Before moving to Norfolk in 1999, the former research scientist taught cooking for adult education courses in Leicester and has now submitted a planning application which would allow her to return to teaching.

If given the go ahead by Breckland council, she plans to deck out an adjoining barn with four hobs, preparation areas, a cooker and a demonstration space.

Her staff would continue to run the catering company while she concentrated on the classes.

Single sessions for groups would allow friends or colleagues to learn a dish and enjoy a meal, four-hour workshops for individuals would see them watch a demonstration by Mrs Choudhry before getting stuck in themselves, and six week courses would teach a range of Indian dishes.

The caterer, who re-trained as a chef in 1994 and spent three months working at the Taj Hotel in Mumbai, said: "I would demonstrate something each week, they would watch how to do it, taste the food and try it themselves. They would cover chicken dishes, vegetarian, fish and snacks."

Samosas, Bombay aloo, lamb rogan josh and chicken garam masala would all be on the menu and the 58-year-old would teach recipes using as much local produce - like courgettes and marrow - as possible.

Mrs Choudhry, who moved to England from India in 1973 following her marriage to husband Rup, said programmes like Masterchef were encouraging more people to learn to cook and Indian cuisine was particularly popular.

She said: "I think it's the flavours. I wasn't brought up on particularly hot food, I like to use more fresh ingredients - ginger, garlic, green chillis - to bring out the flavour rather than the harsh spices."

At least 50 people have already signed up for classes after news of the plans spread through her existing customers. If change of use for the barn is approved, Mrs Choudhry hopes to have the builders in some time in October.

Jessica Corby, who owns Mowles Manor Barns with husband David, said she was excited about her tenant's plans and hoped they would be the start of a number of new ventures there.

She said: "We're trying to make the units work really well. I'm planning to run another training centre from there - an accessible training venue. We're trying to give it a bit of pizzazz."