

# Junior chefs whip up special dishes

Their creations will be served at art therapy fundraiser tonight

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STAR-LEDGER STAFF

It was one part "Iron Chef" with a dollop of "Sesame Street" last night when area youngsters showcased their newfound culinary skills.

Participating in a Creative Heartwork demonstration, the children worked with professional chefs to prepare gourmet concoctions in the nonprofit organization's Morris Plains facility.

Creative Heartwork is an arts-therapy organization for children

who have experienced trauma, loss or serious illness or have disabilities.

Wearing chef hats and aprons, Ryan Ahlberg, Destini Figueroa and Scott Schlosser rolled up their sleeves and followed the expert direction of chef Edward Stone and chef Corey Heyer in preparing chocolate-dipped strawberries and biscotti and lemon raspberry tarts.

Culinary arts class graduates Destini, 9, and Scott, 11, worked with prospective student Ryan, 11, as they bent over their creations

and then helped each other artfully arrange the delicacies on a platter.

Stacey Schlosser watched her son and said the Creative Heartwork experience was beneficial for him.

"If you're not scoring the winning goal or getting straight A's, you can still get praise for being an adventurous eater," Schlosser said, noting Scott has vision and speech impairments.

Last night's event was in preparation for the

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aration for tonight's 11th annual Dinner of Hope at the Pleasantdale Chateau in West Orange. The \$1,000-a-plate fundraiser will benefit Creative Heartwork.

Children come to the arts-therapy program from a variety of backgrounds, said Karen Carbonello, who founded the organization in 2001 and is now its president.

Some are foster children or kids who live in group homes. Some

have experienced major trauma or are victims of abuse. Others have chronic illnesses or disabilities.

But in Creative Heartwork's Stone Soup Kitchen, the emphasis is on healing. The space is named for Stone, who is executive chef of the Balhurst Golf Club and a founding member of the Dinner of Hope.

John Polkowski, a chef at the Juniper Village Assisted Living Facility in Chatham, has worked with two groups of Creative Heartwork children in the culinary arts program.

Polkowski said he tries to sprinkle his cooking classes with stories and tenderness, coaxing the children to participate and feel secure.

"The cooking part is a way to reintroduce them to society, let them know there are good people out there, people you can trust," said Polkowski, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America. "It all really revolves around love."

Creative Heartwork also offers programs in therapeutic dance, photography and painting. All classes are offered on a sliding-fee scale.



TM FARRELL/THE STAR-LEDGER  
Ryan Ahlberg, 11, of Madison pipes lemon mousse into tartlet shells in preparation for Creative Heartwork's Dinner of Hope tonight.