



# Their recipe for success

*Todd Kalchbrenner and Susan Reyes in the kitchen at Collin College's Institute for Hospitality and Culinary Education.*

# Kalchbrenner, Platt, Reyes transition to culinary careers thanks to Collin College's Institute for Hospitality and Culinary Education

**W**HEN ASKED, TODD KALCHBRENNER, Derek Platt and Susan Reyes—Collin College students—could not find many similarities between technology and culinary arts. “You work with all of these ingredients, put them together and make something greater than the sum of the parts,” Kalchbrenner said.

Both are mixtures of creativity and science. When all is said and done, something good comes out of all the sweat and pre-heating whether it's a cake or microchip.

Collin College's Institute for Hospitality and Culinary Education has become the destination for individuals seeking a change in their careers, and it just so happens that several are transitioning from the technology field to the kitchen.

Kalchbrenner, Platt and Reyes collectively left behind more than 60 years of experience in programming, engineering and business before starting second careers in the kitchen.

Kalchbrenner, 54, spent 20 years and braved two buyouts before being laid off.

“They'd been going through lay-off after lay-off. I started planning, and I was going to retire,” Kalchbrenner said. “But I am still pretty young, so I started to look for something to do.”

## He wanted something different.

“Everyone has always told me I should open a restaurant because I cook for family gatherings and holidays,” Kalchbrenner said.

This is a recurring theme between the trio. Reyes said, “A few years ago, my girlfriends and I were commiserating about life and work. A girlfriend told me I should open my own bakery. It had never occurred to me to do that. I was floored.”

Reyes had baked since she was “itty bitty” and continued through college and moving south to work at Texas Instruments. After 25 years, she decided on a career change—to transfer skills she'd honed off-hours into a career.

Collin College not only set Reyes on the path toward a second career in culinary and pastry arts, but it also inspired her dream. As part of a class project, Reyes had to pick a site and business idea and plan her own eatery.

Borne from this was her goal—a homestyle diner that

would be open for breakfast, available for coffee and a pastry in the afternoon, and a hamburger or chicken sandwich for dinner.

“Each day, there would be a daily special on breakfast and lunch and dinner. We would have a selection of pastry items available every day—different kinds of muffins, biscuits, scones, a few breads, and a special dessert,” she said. “That was my ideal place.”

Kalchbrenner calls the faculty at Collin College “top notch” and his favorite class has been “Breads and Rolls.” Coincidentally, it has also been Reyes' favorite...and Platt's.

Derek Platt is a 36-year-old Wylie resident and spent about 15 years at Texas Instruments in testing and quality control.

“I am not a pastry type of person, but I also knew that there is a lot to breads and rolls that are savory and are not just desserts,” Platt said. “It taught me about weighing ingredients instead of breaking out the cups and teaspoons. It made me a lot more disciplined.”

Platt's second career might take a different route compared to Reyes. He wants to possibly work at a hotel cooking food.

Platt took the plunge in January 2012. He quit his job to return to Collin College full time. Certainly, there is an element of chance for anyone that changes his or her career.

As Reyes said, cooking has shown her that you can start over. “I'm not afraid to try new things or try to figure out what went wrong,” Reyes said of baking. “If this batch of dough does not look right, I'll throw some flour in. I don't have any big concerns or worries that it's not going to turn out right. It's not always going to work. That's okay. You'll still learn something from that.”

“I've been quite impressed with the program,” continued Reyes. “They give a well-rounded business education to go along with the culinary instruction to really get the student to appreciate all the work that goes into it and all the different things you need to think about to have your own business.”

Visit [collin.edu/hospitality](http://collin.edu/hospitality) for more information about the Institute for Hospitality and Culinary Education. 

MARK ROBINSON IS A SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR FOR COLLIN COLLEGE.