



Cooking Up Cultural Appreciation

Tasty bites of garlic simmering in steaming olive oil. The rich scent of a roasting butternut squash wafting from the stovetop. Shallots and saffron threads sprinkled over a bubbling broth. These are not the mouth-watering ingredients of a five-star restaurant, but the cozy kitchen on our Mercy Home Girls' campus.

Escaping the wintry night, our girls crowded the warm kitchen and helped to make Mercy Home history as part of our second Cook Italy event.



Cook Italy expands our children's horizons and gives them an appreciation of other cultures.



In celebrating the cuisine of Italy, our young women learn to recognize and appreciate the beauty in our cultural differences.

With John Nitti, president of Isola Imports, Inc., directing, our young women learned to whip up a delicious risotto Milanese, an authentic rice dish from Milan, Italy.

Following the instructions of Nitti and attending members of the Italian American Chamber of Commerce, our young women learned the delicacies of a fine butternut squash risotto. The secret of an enticing risotto lies in a constant stir for almost 60 minutes, Nitti shared. "My arm really hurt," said Shena, one of the night's young chefs. "It was worth it, though. Our risotto turned out really good!"

Our Cook Italy event is part of a greater initiative to expand our children's horizons and give them an appreciation for the diversity and beauty of other cultures. So many of our young people have known little beyond the cold, violent streets of their youth—and experiences such as these afford them the opportunity to grow, learn and find inspiration. Through our cultural diversity activities, like Cook Italy, our children begin to understand and celebrate the many differences they encounter in their every day.

After an evening spent toiling over their dinner, the girls were finally able to sit down and eat. Delighting over their hard work, our young cooks savored



Risotto Milanese

6 cups (48 fl oz) chicken stock
 1/4 cup (2 fl oz) extra-virgin olive oil
 1/2 cup (4 fl oz) finely chopped yellow onion
 2 cups (14 oz) Arborio or Carnaroli rice
 1 cup (8 fl oz) dry white wine, at room temperature
 1–2 tablespoons unsalted butter
 Salt and pepper to taste
 Winter squash (1/2 to 1 cup)
 Saffron (1 or 2 packets)

In a saucepan over medium heat, bring stock to a gentle simmer and maintain over low heat.

In a large, heavy saucepan, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté until softened, about 4 minutes. Add the rice and stir until each grain is well coated with oil and translucent with a white dot in the center, about 3 minutes.

Add the wine and stir until it is completely absorbed. Add winter squash and saffron. Add the simmering stock and ladleful at a time, stirring frequently after each addition. Wait until the stock is almost completely absorbed (but the rice is never dry on top) before adding the next ladleful. Reserve 1/4-cup (2 fl oz) stock to add at the end.

When the rice is almost tender to the bite but slightly firm in the center and looks creamy, after about 20 minutes, remove from the heat and stir in butter to taste and the reserved 1/4-cup stock.

Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve at once.

Makes 6 servings.

With the help of our remarkable friend John Nitti, our girls mastered the intricacies of an authentic Italian dish and spent the evening savoring the results.

their risotto alongside a salad drizzled with their homemade vinaigrette dressing, fresh fruit and a traditional Milanese sweet bread, *panettone*.

Bellies full and spirits soaring, our young women retired for the evening—rejoicing in an evening well spent and a meal shared with their Mercy Home family.

We'd like to extend an official Italian thanks to you, our dear friends who make all these wonderful events possible. Friends like you help our children realize brighter futures. So, from our kitchen to yours: *Grazie!* †

