

# Bringing it all to the table

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR-LEDGER

As the dinner hour approached on a recent Monday night, employees at Classic Thyme, a Westfield cooking school, scurried to set up cooking stations on two long tables.

Surveying it all was David Martone, owner and executive chef, dressed in a dark blue chef's coat and multicolored neckerchief. The preparations were being made for a unique corporate outing, one that would use the art of cooking to foster team-building and collaboration.

Under Martone's guidance, the participants worked collectively to both make and indulge in a delicious full-course meal.

"Think about any relationship you have or are developing, and it often involves sharing a meal with one another. Food is what brings people together. Differences fade away when we're eating," said Martone, a Westfield resident who studied at the French Culinary Institute and then apprenticed at Chez Catherine in his hometown before opening Classic Thyme in 1995.

"These classes put all participants, no matter their position in the company, on the front-line as foot soldiers, where they won't succeed unless each person does his or her part," he added.

Before long, the evening's guests arrived — two dozen staffers from Portfolio

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