

Older-than-average students



After working on Wall Street for 24 years, Ralph Casbarro, 50, of Ocean Township, a lifelong cooking enthusiast, began taking culinary classes at Brookdale Community College. MIKE MCLAUGHLIN/FOR NJ PRESS MEDIA

HEADING BACK TO SCHOOL LATER IN LIFE

By Bill Bowman :: Staff Writer

Ralph Casbarro loves to cook.

So much so that last year, when the 50-year-old Ocean Township (Monmouth County) resident was trying to decide on his second career, his wife steered him to the answer.

Knowing that her husband was considering returning to college to study the culinary arts, Leslee Casbarro told him that if he didn't do it right away, he never would.

So, six months ago, he began taking culinary classes at Brookdale Community College in Middletown.

"I find it interesting because for me, it's not hard," Ralph Casbarro said of his studies. "I just wanted something that I like to do."

Casbarro is not alone. In 2009, the last year for which figures are available, nearly 21,000 of the more than 414,000 students enrolled in New Jersey's 19 community colleges were 50 or older, according to statistics from the New Jersey Council of County Colleges.

Nationally, 388,000 people 50 and older were enrolled in community colleges, according to the American Association of Community Colleges. That figure represented a 6 percent increase from 2007 and 12 percent from 2005, according to the organization.

NEW JERSEY COMMUNITY COLLEGES, BY THE NUMBERS

Number of public colleges: 19

Average annual full-time tuition: \$2,910

Percent of students age 50 and over: 5 percent

Percent of students age 35 to 49: 11 percent

Source: New Jersey Council of County Colleges



Casbarro said he's found that his life experience helps his later-life studies. MIKE MCLAUGHLIN/FOR NJ PRESS MEDIA

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