



Spicing up Life

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Alumnus retires from teaching to pursue love of cooking

Having taught physics for 36 years throughout high schools in Tennessee, Fred Yarbrough ('70) was ready for a career change—one that answered his culinary calling.

Yarbrough, 59, retired in December 2006 from teaching physics at Ooltewah High School near Chattanooga – a decision he made shortly before the start of the 2006-07 school year. He is among the thousands of teachers who retire early from the profession each year for various reasons.

But he is not taking life easy.

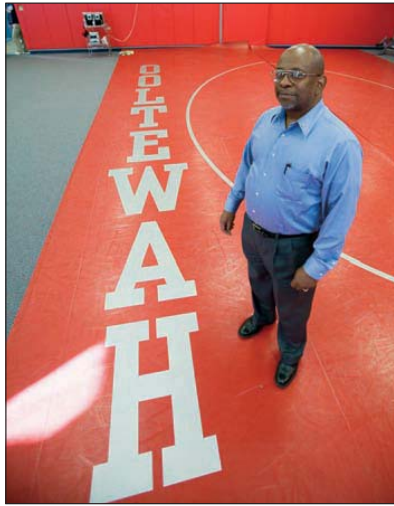
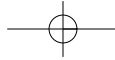
"I'm not going to retire to the rocking chair," says Yarbrough in an insistent tone, shaking his head.

Today, Yarbrough is spicing up life by pursuing his lifelong craving – a change from stirring up new ideas to whipping up favorite dishes.



"If I had lived in another part of the country, I would have gone to culinary school," Yarbrough says resolutely. "I love to cook."

Roast meats. Casseroles. Fruit cobblers. Name it, and Yarbrough makes it. Fried chicken, barbecue ribs, cornbread dressing, white beans with ham and even a good hotdog are among his favorite dishes, or what he calls "good comfort foods." He's the chef at home. He even knows how to prepare simple dough.



The secret to great cooking, however, involves more than following a recipe, Yarbrough advises. The secret is in the seasoning.

“That’s the key,” he says, stressing with his forefinger. “And the only way you’re going to know is by experimenting.”

And with any dish, he can taste about how much seasoning was used.

“It’s called using the old-time math,” he says. “Just by tasting it, I know how much was put in. But the thing is, you should season to the point where you like it.”

Yarbrough’s love for cooking began as a child growing up in Covington, about 40 miles northwest of Memphis. His mother, who was a beautician, taught her son to cook.

“I cooked a lot of dinners because Daddy worked outside the home and so did my mother, so I had to take care of the house,” Yarbrough says. “From my mom, I got the cooking bug.”

That early appreciation for food and nourishment has served as a mainstay in Yarbrough’s life. Nightly at home, he says, the supper table included a starch, two vegetables, a meat and bread.

As Yarbrough gained experience in the kitchen, his taste buds sharpened, giving him the ability to tell how much of an ingredient is in the dish. Seasoning is important, he repeats.

A few times in 2006 when school was not in session, Yarbrough worked for a friend who operated a catering business. He helped to prepare breakfasts for large groups, his days starting as early as 5 a.m.

Today, Yarbrough continues catering. But Yarbrough finds happiness when he cooks for family and friends – that is what he seeks in his retiring years.

“I’ve catered a couple of parties, but I find more enjoyment when I cook for a gathering at our house,” he says. “I love to entertain – setting out a brunch, lunch, supper buffet – and watch people enjoy my cooking.”



Yarbrough’s love for cooking is as strong as his passion for mathematics and physics. He earned a scholarship to attend Austin Peay State University and pursued Bachelor of Science degrees in the two fields.

“I never liked biology because you had to



Austin Peay





learn too many different names for plants,” he says jokingly. “I stuck with math and physics because I thought about going into engineering. But I found teaching to be my calling.”

He recalls his four years at Austin Peay with much gusto, sharing the memories he has for the campus and people.

“I didn’t feel out of place,” says Yarbrough, now a member of the APSU National Alumni Association Board of Directors. “The faculty, the friends I made, were a family to me.”

“Austin Peay was a good place to be.”

After graduating in 1970 from Austin Peay, Yarbrough began teaching physics at schools in Memphis, remaining there for about 25 years before moving to Ooltewah to teach for the last 11 years of his career.

For Yarbrough, making the transition from the high school classroom to the kitchen was far from challenging. In the kitchen, ingredients are mixed appropriately to create a mouth-watering recipe. In the classroom, Yarbrough stressed maturity, responsibility and pride – the key ingredients for a successful high school student about to transition into adulthood.

“I teach them to understand, not memorize, their notes,” Yarbrough says. “I tell them they need to take pride in their work. And I keep trying to help them realize they can be better.”

“Someday, these students will understand what I was trying to tell them.” **AP**

Now that he is retired, Fred Yarbrough ('70) will remain near Chattanooga and work with Darnell Moss, right, owner of the catering service, Moss' Place, to pursue his culinary passion.