

Falcon cafe employees to graduate, pursue jobs or keep training

By Dillon Chapell

In the far back corner of the second floor, where Publisher's Row and Pythagorean Parkway meet, lies the Falcon Cafe, a place for teachers and other staff members to order food and drinks — all prepared and delivered by students.

Six seniors who will be in commencement ceremonies, **Ruth Bullock, Katie Jones, Emily Ray, Dylan Reed, Mariah VanHoose and Shawn Williams**, regularly work to serve and prepare food there.

Another Falcon Cafe 2018 "graduate" is **Jan Binder**, who oversees much of the students' kitchen

work. She is retiring after 20 years of working for Perry Township Schools. Before that, Binder worked for nine years in Beech Grove schools.

On any given day, visitors to the cafe will hear the petite woman, who doesn't look old enough to retire, gently reminding students about how to use a paring knife or how to double-check the accuracy of an order.

Eight years ago, the school received a grant of \$1,500 dollars to start the Falcon Cafe, and Binder has operated it and helped it grow ever since. The cafe is an outgrowth of the coffee service that

social studies teacher **Jerry Brown** provided before retiring, making and selling coffee for 50 cents a cup. (Brown is still devoted to Perry as its volunteer historian and archivist.)

Students enrolled in the special education department's work skills program are paid Falcon Cafe employees - cooking, taking ordering and delivering the food. They work in the cafe until 11 a.m. and then attend other classes. They are all students of special education teacher **Maggie Cooper**.

The young people are also community volunteers, thanks to the work of job coach **Jacque Mil-**

holland. They help out at St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry, Teacher's Treasures, Meals on Wheels and the VA Hospital.

Of the six graduates, Reed, Williams, and Ruth will be leaving Perry to find jobs. Jones is instead going to pursue post secondary training at the Erskine Green Training Institute in Muncie.

**"They'll find jobs, and they've just been amazing to work with."
-Jan Binder**

Students with disabilities take classes there to prepare them for jobs in food service, at hotels or in healthcare facilities.

The two remaining students, Ray and Vanhose, plan to attend Perry classes for another year to continue improving their vocational skills. Under federal law, students may receive special education services until age 22.

Binder is looking forward to retirement, but she's enjoyed working with this senior class and previous ones, observing as they mature and learn new skills and teamwork.

"They'll find jobs, and they've just been amazing to work with."



Senior Emily Ray enjoys spending time with friends when she's not working in the Falcon Café (Photo provided by Andrea Alvarez).



Some Falcon Café members are in Best Buddies, which pairs special education students with students not in those classes.



This sign welcomes students and faculty as they enter the Falcon Café where students help prepare and deliver food to teachers (Photo by Olivia Lighty).