

MODERN COOKING

High-tech heaven

Controlled vapor oven makes it easy to regulate moisture, browning of foods

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CHAMPAIGN — Cooks in days gone by might have added a water bath to the oven while cooking a roast to keep it moist.

But now, a new controlled vapor or CVap oven, used in several restaurants and other facilities in the area, controls moisture of the food cooked inside reliably and energy-efficiently.

Chef Thad Morrow uses one at his downtown Champaign restaurant, Bacaro.

The oven creates a carefully controlled, humidified environment where a variety of foods can be cooked.

Morrow can control how brown the oven cooks the food inside, and how moist it is, using arrows on the front of the stainless-steel oven.

"It's almost too simple," Morrow said last week at Bacaro.

You can cook meat, fish, vegetables and even custards in the CVap oven, he said. He tried turkey in the oven recently, he said, and got good results.

He can even take food from the oven and sear it before serving.

"The beauty is, you can hold it at a specific temperature," Morrow said. That means keeping the food at a low heat — but high enough that it's still safe to eat. Temperatures on standard ovens can fluctuate, with less dependable results.

The CVap at Bacaro cost about the same as a standard commercial oven, Morrow said, about \$4,000. Plus it doesn't get hot, which means its top can be used as a workspace in his kitchen.

And while he said he's still experimenting with what the oven can do, he said he's glad he has one.

"It's so simple," Morrow said. "It's such a great thing to have."

Dan Proctor, the owner of KECdesign in Champaign, has sold several CVap ovens, including ones to Morrow and other restaurateurs. He said similar ovens



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ABOVE: Ann Swanson puts chicken into the CVap oven at Bacaro restaurant in downtown Champaign last week. **TOP:** The controls let cooks create a carefully controlled, humidified environment.

will be installed in the new renovation of Garden Hills Elementary School and at the new Washington Elementary School, both in Champaign. Holy Cross school also uses a CVap oven.

Along with being easy to use, the oven doesn't use as much energy as traditional ovens and also results

in less shrinkage in foods, he said. For example, if a restaurant advertises a certain-size portion, the uncooked cut can be smaller if cooked in a CVap, compared with a traditional oven. He said the CVap is a versatile tool.

"It certainly forces people to rethink how they cook," Proctor

said. It will also affect the finished product, he said.

"In order to cook food at a very slow and low temperature, CVap really creates a different flavor signature and a different bite signature than what most people are accustomed to," he said.

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