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### **GWU Alumnus Serves Fresh and Local Dishes as an Executive Chef**

Office of University Communications

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# GWU Alumnus Serves Fresh and Local Dishes as an Executive Chef

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Office of University Communications

November 10, 2017



*Jon Kirby Cooks for Residents at Grace Ridge Retirement Community*

photo of John Kirby

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—As executive chef at Grace Ridge Retirement Community in Morganton, N.C., Gardner-Webb University alumni Jon Kirby prepares fresh, local food and exciting recipes for the residents. Kirby was hired at Grace Ridge four years ago as a sous chef and was promoted to executive chef last fall. This rewarding job gives him the chance to provide healthy meals while getting to know the residents' tastes. Kirby has been working in the food service industry since age 15, and he now pulls in inspiration from his extensive travels where he had the opportunity to learn about food in other cultures.

Kirby majored in sociology at Gardner-Webb and continued developing his cooking skills as a student. "While I attended Gardner-Webb," he explained, "I thought about going into counseling or some sort of social work. After a bit of at-risk youth counseling, I decided that was not going to make me happy." After graduating in 2005, Kirby's interest in other countries and cultures inspired him to travel. He moved to Hawaii and began cooking at various restaurants. He has also traveled to Asia, Europe, Africa, South America and the British Isles. "My most influential trip was when I spent two months in Japan," he added. "I fell in love with their attitude towards growing their own food and their amazing styles of cooking."

At Grace Ridge, Kirby enjoys working with the residents and hearing their stories. He commented, "My favorite part about my job is that every day is different. We cater to various events, have a constantly-changing menu, build personal relationships with residents and guests, and face the challenges that come with managing a diverse kitchen." He has also expanded his passion for working with food by starting Kirby's Creek Farm in the Dysartsville area, which he manages alongside his wife. They focus on producing food in a

bio-diverse and ecologically friendly way. “This hobby ties in wonderfully with my career,” he remarked. “There is nothing better than bringing my home-grown food into the kitchen and sharing it with my customers.”

While at Gardner-Webb, Kirby enjoyed the friendly, community environment. “I miss playing ultimate frisbee on the quad and hanging out with friends at Broad River Coffee Company,” he stated. “I believe the most crucial thing I learned during my time there was how to manage time effectively. I also learned a good deal about myself and what I wanted in life.” After his experiences exploring his passions in other cultures, Kirby has this advice to share with current Gardner-Webb students: “Dive into new challenges and make mistakes. Many people are afraid that mistakes define who they are, and they are afraid to put themselves out there and try. I tell my employees there is nothing better than making a mistake if you choose to learn and grow.”

*Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university that prepares students to become critical thinkers, effective leaders and compassionate servants in the global community. Emphasizing a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics, Gardner-Webb ignites learning and service opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.*