North grad’s homemade videos attracting major You Tube eyes

By Jon Swedien
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Joe Luginbill had just planned to cook, share some recipes and maybe make some of his friends laugh.

Little did the recent Eau Claire North graduate know that when on Wednesday he posted his latest homemade cooking video on You Tube, he was on his way toward becoming an Internet sensation.

“I don’t know exactly how that happened. I just post those for fun,” Luginbill said of the handful of videos he’s posted on You Tube in recent weeks that feature him cooking simple-to-follow recipes under the headline, “Joe’s Kitchen.”

But his latest video, which celebrated the birthday of his idol, cooking-show host Julia Child, has caught fire on the web.

As of Friday, it had garnered 1.3 million views.

“It’s kind of a weird thing for me,” Luginbill said.

The past couple of days have been a whirlwind for the 18-year-old. He’s been courted by a talent agency. He’s received a call from famed food critic Marion Kane, who was good friends with Luginbill’s hero Child. And all of it has made him reconsider his college major.

Last month, Luginbill posted his first cooking video on You Tube, in which he described some easy recipes for college kids. His 12-year-old sister Annisa worked the camera. Luginbill edited the videos on his home computer. Friends encouraged him to do it because they know he loves to cook.

In the weeks that followed Luginbill posted more videos. He demonstrated how to make chocolate mousse and pasta primavera. The videos were moderately popular, drawing between a couple hundred and a couple hundred thousand views.

Then came the recognition.

Luginbill said he was struck last week when at a gas station two girls he’d never met recognized him from his videos. They asked him to sign an autograph. His signed his receipt.
“So they know I spent $50 on gas,” Luginbill added.

Then it was Kane, the popular Toronto Star food editor, who called Luginbill to talk about Child, her longtime friend and his hero, he said. The call meant a lot to Luginbill, he said. It was Child who inspired him to cook after he watched her when he was a young boy — along with his great-grandmother, Irma Bauer, of Durand, who showed Luginbill how to cook when he was a child.

Like Child, Luginbill said he wants to inspire other people to cook and to show them it’s not as hard as they think.

Luginbill also received a call from Distinctive Celebrations Talent, a Wausau-based talent agency.

“As a talent agent, I see great potential with this young entrepreneur who is a natural in front of the camera,” said Janet Lawrence, owner of Distinctive Celebrations Talent. “He showcases his cooking show with some excellent instruction and comedic timing. The sky is the limit for this young man.”

Asked about all the attention, Luginbill smiles and shakes his head.

Meanwhile, he’s also thinking about his future and asking himself if cooking and entertainment have a place in his career plans. Luginbill plans to attend UW-Stout next semester. He had planned to major in business administration. But now he’s considering majoring in UW-Stout’s food systems and technology program. It would be a degree that could prepare him for a career as a restaurant owner, a food editor or in food-related advertising. He’s also considering a double major.

Regardless, Luginbill said he’s going to find time to keep posting his cooking videos.

Asked what he plans to demonstrate in his next video, he said, “Maybe a little cajun. ... You’ll just have to wait and see.”

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