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Seven students graduate from Food Bank's Culinary School

Newark, Del. (July 21, 2016) – The Food Bank of Delaware celebrated the accomplishments this week of seven students who successfully completed the organization's 14-week culinary program in Newark and Milford.

Three of these students were able to complete the training program thanks to an \$18.8 million USDA grant provided to the state of Delaware to train adults who receive food benefits and have limited job skills or work experience.

This employment and training program called Delaware WONDER (Work Opportunity Networks to Develop Employment Readiness) is led by Delaware Health and Social Services Division of Social Services (DHSS), which administers the SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) Program in Delaware. It offers targeted career tracks in construction, culinary arts, manufacturing and broad-based job placement.

"Through Delaware WONDER's partnership with the Food Bank of Delaware, these Culinary Program graduates now have the critical skills to make the successful transition to the world of work and self-sufficiency," DHSS Secretary Rita Landgraf said. "This shows our ability to support individuals with limited job skills or work experience to get the training they need to thrive in the community."

The graduates are: Jermachel Deshields, Michael Hutchens, Lisa Messina, Justin Roundtree (Milford), Gerald Hynson, Terrence Kelly and Akou Kossi (Newark). Newark class 42 graduate David Faison was recognized at the Newark graduation as he was not able to attend his graduation ceremony in May.

State Attorney General Matt Denn served as keynote speaker for the Newark graduation, while Chef Carol Ellis, Banquets Sous Chef at Dover Downs Hotel & Casino, provided the keynote address for the Milford graduation earlier in the week on Tuesday.

"The graduates of the Food Bank's Culinary School are walking away with more than just the ability to move around a kitchen, they're ready to go out and move into the working world," said Attorney General Denn. "The skills they learned and developed will go a long way to help them find and keep good jobs, while helping them maintain self-sufficiency in their own lives."

Graduates have spent the past 14 weeks developing their skills in the culinary arts with Chef Instructors Donnie Stephens and Tom Craft (Newark) and Tish Badamshin and Tim Hunter (Milford). Three-hundred hours of culinary training focused on ServSafe® food sanitation skills, advanced knife skills, moist and dry heat cooking techniques, introduction to baking, international cooking and more.

In addition to learning hands-on skills in the Food Bank's industrial-sized kitchen, the students enjoyed guest chef demonstrations, went on local field trips, catered special events and more.

Stephens and Badamshin were both pleased with the graduates' progress over the past 14 weeks.

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“It’s been a challenging 14-week journey, but these students made it,” said Badamshin. “They know they can always come back to us for advice, job placement and more.”

Students completed two-week internships at Café 67, Hartefeld National Golf Club, The Lorelton Retirement and Assisted Living, Dover Downs and the Food Bank of Delaware.

“I came into the program because I was trying to find a job. I was used to working,” said the 36-year-old former electrician who had a brush with the law. On Tuesday, he received the “Most Improved” award during the Milford ceremony.

“I thank God. Once I listened to her (Badamshin), I know she’s wise. I’m looking to college in the future. I’m in the mood to go further,” he said. He will also be working with Chef Carol Ellis at Dover Downs.

“I enjoyed the program,” said Newark graduate Gerri Hynson. “It’s challenging as well as rewarding and I’ve learned a lot. Being in this program made me realize I want to go on and get a degree in culinary arts.”

Food Bank of Delaware President and CEO Patricia Beebe praised the students for their commitment to the training program.

“Workforce development is a critical part of our mission at the Food Bank of Delaware,” said Beebe. “We know that in order to achieve our vision of a community free of hunger, Delawareans need training opportunities that will lead to sustainable employment and income. These seven students have the tools they need to thrive in Delaware’s food service industry.”

The mission of The Culinary School is two-fold. First students are taught skills that are highly desirable to employers in the food industry and second, these newly-developed skills have the potential to lead to jobs in the industry that provide job security and economic sustainability.

Students are referred to the program through the Department of Corrections, Delaware Department of Labor, Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and other community-based organizations.

The next class in both Newark and Milford begins September 13. Applications are currently being accepted. Students may sign up online by visiting <http://www.fbd.org/the-culinary-school/> or calling Lynda Pusey (New Castle County) (302) 292-1305 ext 265 or Ruthann Messick (Kent and Sussex Counties) (302) 424-3301 ext 107.

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About the Food Bank of Delaware:

The Food Bank of Delaware distributes millions of pounds of products each year to its network of 575 hunger-relief program partners throughout the state and also provides thousands of meals a month for children through the After-School Nutrition Program, the Summer Food Service Program and the Backpack Program. The Food Bank’s hunger-relief programs provide for Delawareans at risk of going without meals each year. The Culinary School at the Food Bank of Delaware, the Food Bank’s workforce development arm, provides training for adults interested in careers in the food service industry. For more information about the Food Bank of Delaware, visit www.fbd.org or call (302) 292-1305.