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Twenty-two students graduate from The Culinary School at the Food Bank of Delaware

Newark, Del. (Aug. 23, 2018) – A mother-daughter duo, a specialty baker, a graduate with three jobs post-graduation, and 18 other students with unique stories of their own were among the 54th graduating class at the Food Bank of Delaware’s Culinary School. A commencement ceremony was held this morning at the hunger-relief organization’s Newark headquarters.

The graduates were: Javon Brown, Ray Coleman, Alexis Conix, Matthew Dickerson, Kahlil El-Bey, Shavonne Fair, Janinne Flowers, Tanice Hinkson, Jasmine Johnson, Ronnie Jones, Darlene Adams-Thompson, Matinya Love, Ty’aire Miller, Lorna Roach, Ronston Roberts, Marilyn Roman, Aida Santiago, Deborah Shields, Desha Shields, Jonny Villanueva, Leon Wilson and Gary Yeatman.

Ray Fitzgerald, Director, Division of Social Services for the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services provided keynote remarks. “Folks who let obstacles become barriers stop and give up,” he told students. “If you work hard and stick to it, this stuff will pay off.”

Graduate Deborah Shields said she almost quit the program multiple times, but persevered.

Shields attended the daytime culinary class after her overnight shift at Amazon. “Everyone has helped me greatly,” she said. “I work at Amazon all night; I come in, and, yes, I am tired. I wasn’t sure I was going to make it through the program because of that, but I pushed through.”

She was joined by fellow classmate and daughter, Desha Shields. “I would like to give a special thank you to a very special person... my daughter. In class when I was sitting there dozing off she would whisper, ‘Mommy!’” Deborah explained.

The program was not without tears as the new graduates expressed gratitude for the opportunities they received during the 14-week program. Students learned knife skills, food safety and sanitation, a variety of cooking techniques and more. More importantly, they learned life lessons that will carry with them post-graduation.

“You learn a lot more than cooking,” said graduate Jasmine Johnson, “You learn how to be with people. It’s just been fun. It was a lot more than we expected. They made you think about more important things in life; it’s more than just holding a knife.”

All but three students have gained employment and two had interviews immediately following the graduation ceremony.

Five students were honored with special awards. They were:

- Best Dish: Ray Coleman
- Most Improved: Ronston Roberts
- Most Dedicated: Jannine Flowers
- Iron Chef Award: Gary Yeatman
- Highest GPA: Jasmine Johnson

After the ceremony, graduates prepared and served guests a lunch buffet that included baked fish, brisket, roasted turkey, Spanish chicken and rice, macaroni and cheese, collard greens, desserts and more.

The Culinary School is part of Delaware Food Works, a workforce development initiative of the Food Bank of Delaware. Delaware Food Works consists of training in food service, warehousing and logistics, and agriculture. 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 Delaware Health and Social Services, Delaware Department of Labor, Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Connections Community Support Programs, Career Team and other community-based organizations.

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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 536 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 Grab and Go Program and the Backpack Program. The Food Bank of Delaware provides community outreach through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC). Financial literacy coaching through \$tand By Me and nutrition education are also offered to empower Delawareans. Delaware Food Works, a workforce development initiative of the Food Bank of Delaware, provides training for adults interested in careers in the food service industry, warehousing/logistics and agriculture. For more information about the Food Bank of Delaware, visit www.fbd.org or call (302) 292-1305.