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Culinary School students begin new food service chapter

Newark, Del. (April 23, 2019) – Eleven members of The Culinary School at the Food Bank of Delaware celebrated their achievements today during a graduation ceremony for the 24th class at the Food Bank’s Milford facility.

The new graduates are: Keya Butcher, Isela Cordero, Dale Costen, Miles Footerman, Dashunda Harmon, Rovina Hill, Kameron Mason, Taylor Mereider, Gordon Pruitt, Vanessa Singletary, and Yeris Soriano.

Dogfish Head Restaurants’ Executive Chef Lou Ortiz, a Delaware native, was guest speaker at the ceremony. He told the new graduates the “food service industry is rich and evolving,” and described it as “thriving, young at heart.”

He urged the graduates to “embrace the crazy” and “respect your leaders and fight for them. Never let your pride outweigh the common goal, and never give up on yourself.”

The Food Bank’s Executive Chef Tim Hunter spoke about the positive changes he has seen in the graduating class and praised the class for their hard work. “It’s work every day to get here. I don’t want you to thank me. I just want you to keep your job,” he said.

Under the instruction of Food Bank of Delaware Chef Instructor Tish Badamshin and the guidance of Workforce Training Program Manager Ruthann Messick, the students spent the past 14 weeks developing their skills and passion for the culinary arts.

From proper knife handling techniques to Serve Safe certification and completing a two-week work experience, the students are now prepared for entry-level jobs in the food industry.

The students also spoke of the life changes they experienced during the 14-week program, and those remarks brought tears and smiles to those in the audience.

“I’ve been through a lot to get where I am here today, to achieve what I achieved,” said graduate Kameron Mason. “This is my first job ever in my life.”

“I don’t have the greatest past, but my future is so bright,” said Dashunda Harmon.

Graduate Yeris Soriano echoed those remarks. “Life isn’t easy. Some of us tried to take shortcuts to success, but learned the hard way... It’s all about my son now.”

Following the ceremony, the graduates showcased their newly acquired skills by serving a delicious lunch they had prepared for family and friends.

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. The Culinary School is part of the Food Bank of Delaware’s workforce development initiative, Delaware Food Works. Its mission is to eliminate food insecurity through workforce development and social entrepreneurship.

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

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