Keiser University’s Center for Culinary Arts in Melbourne makes big strides; earns ACF accreditation at the ‘exemplary’ level, WACS quality recognition

By Ken Doltzman

In the mid-2000s, Fort Lauderdale-based Keiser University, which has cut its niche offering degree in fields with strong job-growth potential, stepped into the world of culinary arts expanding its academic horizon in a whole new way.

The school’s first culinary program was established at its Tallahassee campus, followed by rollouts in Melbourne and then Sarasota, all in a timely fashion. Keiser University has an associate of science degree in the culinary arts.

“We have graduated about 1,000 students at the three campuses since launching the program,” said Joseph Hardiman, Keiser University’s associate vice chancellor for culinary arts, who is headquartered at the Fort Lauderdale campus.

“The program has been well-received in the communities. We’re proud of our graduates. They are scattered everywhere.”

At Keiser University’s Center for Culinary Arts in Melbourne, Chef James McGuinness said its graduates hold positions in the industry in Wyoming, New Hampshire, Colorado, and other states. They are all over the map. We have set up a Facebook page to keep up to date on where our graduates are working.

“The opportunities for the graduates are varied, as hospitality and tourism is one of the largest employment segments of the U.S. economy.

People can learn more about culinary education and other programs offered at the Melbourne campus on South Babcock Street during “March into the Future,” an academic open house from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on March 7.

Graduates of the culinary program are prepared to pursue a range of positions in such settings as restaurants, hotels, clubs and resorts, food-production facilities, product development and test kitchens, cruise lines, retirement facilities, and as entrepreneurs.

“The quality of the placements are very good, and we’re getting inquiries from employers around the nation,” said McGuinness, who is dean of culinary arts at the Melbourne campus.

“If the students learn to work with each other in our test kitchen, they will be successful working in similar environments within the industry,” added Hardiman. Culinary study is perhaps unlike any other career field, in that it casts a wide net in attracting students. The makeup, especially, includes people who are looking to change occupations.

“We have a really interesting mix of students come through the program,” said McGuinness, who has in-depth experience across a broad spectrum of his industry.

“What helps me connect to the students is the fact that I am a career-changer, too.”

After college, I went to work for a large Fortune 500 company and “toured the U.S. in a sales position. I enjoyed the travel, but not so much the actual sales call. So I decided to make a career change. I always had an interest in cooking. I went to work as an apprentice for the American Culinary Federation in Chicago. They have chapters around the nation and at that time I was living in Chicago.”

McGuinness earned his bachelor’s degree in economics from Adelphi University. He worked for International Paper in the mid-1980s and was based in greater New York City. His resume includes five years as a sous chef for the Four Seasons Hotel in Chicago. As a company, the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts are ranked among the top luxury hotels worldwide.

“The students in the culinary program want to be in our commercial kitchen learning, in a hands-on manner, and they are learning from someone who has years and years of experience in the industry,” said Kimberly Dale, Keiser University’s regional director of media and public relations. “Chef McGuinness is leading the program to a new level of excellence.”

McGuinness, who once taught at the Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Chicago, says a lot of “good things” have happened over the last few years that have elevated Keiser University’s culinary arts program in Melbourne.

One of them is accreditation at the “exemplary” level by the American Culinary Federation Inc. Established in 1929, it is the “standard of excellence” for chefs in North America and the culinary leader in offering educational resources, training, apprenticeship, and program accreditation.

Keiser University’s culinary arts program in Melbourne also has been singled out by the World Association of Chef Societies for its quality. It is one of only three such culinary programs recognized with this distinction in the United States. “We are extremely proud of that honor,” said McGuinness, who will mark his fifth year with the local program in June.

The World Association of Chef Societies was founded in 1988 at the Sorbonne in Paris. At that first congress there were 65 delegates from 17 countries, representing 38 national and international associations. Today, this global body has 93 official chef associations as members that represent more than 10 million professional chefs.

“The World Association of Chef Societies is the umbrella organization for the American Culinary Federation and the

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Interest in culinary careers has surged with television programming like "The Cooking Channel" and "Food Network" playing a role raising the industry's visibility to millions of people of all ages.

Many baby-boomers recall watching Julia Child, whose cooking shows on television in the 1970s and 1980s attracted fairly wide audiences, as did Graham Kerr's "The Galloping Gourmet."

Child wrote what became, according to experts, the definitive book on French cooking, a two-volume set titled "Mastering the Art of French Cooking."

But even before Child and Kerr, there was Philo Farnsworth. In 1956, while maintaining her flight attendant job with American Airlines on the weekends, she inaugurated a half-hour live television show called "Kitchen Korner," shown in the South on WSM-TV in Nashville, Tenn. For more than half a century, Farnsworth, who pioneered Southern hospitality and cuisine through her combined careers as chef, caterer, underkeeper, cookbook author, airline caterer and early TV star.

In the late 1950s, journalist Craig Claiborne, who was the longtime food editor and restaurant critic for "The New York Times," began his career. He went on to author "The New York Times Cookbook" in 1961. The enduring 717-page book is still is print and remains one of the top-selling publications of its kind on a yearly basis. It has sold more than 3 million copies.

McGuinness says the career she chose, after leaving her sales position with a global company, was the right one for him. "I greatly enjoy my role at Keiser University. I love teaching and seeing our graduates go on and build their careers. It's exciting."

Women's Center Guild to host informational meeting Feb. 10 at Heritage Isle

VIERA — The Women's Center in Viera is reaching out to the residents of Heritage Isle in hopes of finding new members to assist in their outreach program. The South Guild of the Women's Center will be hosting a membership informational meeting from 1 to 3 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 10, in the clubhouse at Heritage Isle. The clubhouse is at 6800 Legacy Blvd. The Guild is the fund-raising arm of the Women's Center in Viera. The members act as goodwill ambassadors and advocates, enhancing community awareness and broadening the base of financial support. For more information about the organization and to RSVP for this event, call 253-9035 or e-mail RoseMaryBian@me.com

The Women's Center in Viera is a nonprofit, domestic violence resource center whose mission is to "empower women and their families to achieve safe, healthy, self-sufficient lives by providing support, education, counseling, information and services."

For more information about its programs and services, call 242-3110 or visit www.WomensCenterInViera.org

The 10th Annual Revolution Technologies Women's Pro Tennis Classic at Kiwi Tennis Club is a Har-Tru USTA Pro Circuit Wild Card Challenge, the last in a three-tournament series wherein the American who wins the highest number of WTA points will earn a Main Draw Wild Card into the 2015 French Open...

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