
Culinary Training Program Proves Its Mettle

It was almost one year ago that Moveable Feast began The Culinary Arts and Life Skills Training Program, created to fulfill an important need in our community: providing people with few marketable skills the opportunity to secure employment in decent paying jobs with benefits. This program offers men and women an opportunity to acquire or build on prior skills and to open up new doors to them in the food service industry.

The Abell Foundation played a tremendous role in developing this program and has provided generous support. As funding was put into place, Moveable Feast worked with various agencies such as Goodwill Industries, Genesis Jobs, and Volunteers of America to refer potential students to this unique program. In January of 2003, Chef Bill Antonio welcomed the first group of students into his classroom at our facility located in the old Haussner's Restaurant on Eastern Avenue. Expectations were great and we were not disappointed, as evidenced by the fact that our third class is currently in session.

The program has proven to be tremendously successful, with students from our first two classes acquiring jobs in restaurants and catering establishments in above-minimum-wage positions with benefits. One student was so inspired, that she decided to continue her training and was accepted to the Baltimore International College, our local culinary arts school. Another student, Renardo "Nardi" Quarles, showed such dedication and enthusiasm in the classroom that he was offered a position here in our kitchen. Much to our delight, he was happy to stay on with Moveable Feast.

Renardo first found out about the program from a flyer distributed by the Volunteers of America in the Chesapeake Paca House, where he was living. At that time, he was working at a temp agency and thought that our program seemed to be a good opportunity. He always had an interest in cooking, but previously-held positions in restaurants only involved dishwashing and doing minor food prep work. Renardo took it upon himself to speak with an advocate from Volunteers of America who arranged for an interview with Chef Bill. Following his interview, Nardi was accepted into the program with the understanding that the course involved a lot of work.

As the course progressed, Nardi did encounter challenges; some curriculum-related, and others of a more personal nature. Due to the amount of work involved, Nardi felt that he needed to quit his part-time temp job in order to focus more on his studies. And although the curriculum incorporates a lot of hands-on learning, textbooks are also used in the class. This presented an additional challenge for Nardi, who has difficulty reading. He knew he was in for some rough times.

On the class's first quiz Nardi knew he did not do well. He approached Chef Bill and told him of his problem. Bill then quizzed

him orally and Nardi was able to answer the questions satisfactorily. Nardi feels that this action -- this reaching out and being open with Chef Bill -- was the best thing he could have done. This was a major stepping-stone for Nardi in building his confidence and increasing his determination to be successful in the course. He continued to

speaking up and ask questions when he needed a little extra help. Ultimately, Nardi believes this involvement is why he succeeded. "Be open-minded; listen carefully. A lot of what you learn will take you a long way." He gave this advice to the most recent group of students new to the program. He told them of a fellow classmate who didn't listen carefully and wound up cutting himself when learning about proper knife handling and cutting techniques.

For now Nardi is content to stay with Moveable Feast. "A lot of success is just being here, helping people, and making connections. I'm anxious to help other students; and I would like to help Chef Bill as

a teaching assistant," he said.

In the future Nardi plans to go back to school and get his GED because, "Taking this culinary course has given me the courage and confidence to do that."

Finally, Nardi thanks his advocate from Volunteers of America at the Chesapeake Paca House who allowed him to maintain his residence there after he quit his part-time job. He also appreciates the dedication of Moveable Feast for opening new doors for him. As for us, we couldn't be more pleased with his decision to be a part of our family.

We would also like to congratulate Nardi's fellow graduates from our second class: Darryl Brown, Jean Campbell, Craig Crowner, Brian Jenkins, Joseph Mercer, Reginald Terry, Angela White, and LaShawn Williford. We wish them every success in their new jobs.

