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Inaugural Class of UVI CELL Culinary Program Celebrates Success at Closing Ceremony

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UVI Cell Culinary Program graduates. By. THE UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

The University of Virgin Islands' Center for Excellence in Leadership and Learning (CELL) Culinary Program held a closing ceremony on May 22 honoring the accomplishments of its first cohort of students.

Under the guidance of Executive Chef Kerish Robles, the UVI CELL Culinary Program proved to be a transformative experience for the students, equipping them with a thorough understanding of the culinary arts, according to UVI.

This innovative six-month certified fundamentals cook program was designed to cater to students of all ages, with the first cohort ranging from 18 to their 70s. Of the 15 participants, 12

successfully graduated, with one student awaiting the results of the certification exam.

Graduates of this comprehensive program received the Certified Fundamentals Cooks recognition from the American Culinary Federation (ACF), marking the first of 15 potential levels of ACF certification. The program's curriculum, meticulously curated by Chef Robles, included a wide range of essential topics from safety and sanitation, nutrition, vegetable preparation, stocks, sauces, soups, baking, breakfast, to supervision management and internships in server courses and protein fabrication.

The program went above and beyond, providing students with Servsafe Food Handler's certification from the National Restaurant Association and the opportunity to earn additional industry certifications. This rigorous training enhanced their employability, with two students already securing employment at local establishments, and one receiving a promotion since the program's inception.

"My experience in the UVI CELL Culinary Program was very eventful and informative. My progress through it was quite delightful. All the teachers that taught me were very informative... I had a great time in the program," expressed program graduate Je'Von Smith.

The UVI CELL Culinary Program also offered the unique opportunity to join the Virgin Islands Chapter of the American Culinary Federation as student culinarian members. This membership grants them access to a myriad of professional development opportunities, including the pursuit of higher-level certifications.

Four adventurous students chose to pursue the Fundamental Pastry Cook certification, and all passed with flying colors. This further demonstrates the program's successful implementation and the dedication of its students.

A pivotal part of the program was the hands-on experience gained at the on-campus restaurant, Wild Sage Bistro. This fully operational restaurant allowed students to rotate through various roles and understand both front-of-house and back-of-house operations.

According to the release, looking towards the future, the UVI CELL Culinary Program is eager to welcome the second cohort in Fall 2023, with plans to reopen the Wild Sage Bistro. Chef Robles has also curated courses for advanced professionals and hobbyists, highlighting the program's commitment to catering to a broad range of learners. With local businesses acknowledging the talent nurtured by the UVI CELL Culinary Program, its mission to enhance the culinary industry and meet the demand for skilled professionals is well on its way to realization.