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Austin Chefs & Culinary Pros Host 650 Central Texas High School Culinary Arts Students for Fifth Annual Career Showcase

*Austin Food & Wine Alliance Serves up Innovative 'Day of Culinary Career Inspiration'
Free for Local Culinary Students at Palmer Events Center
\$18,000 in Scholarships Available from Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts*

AUSTIN, TX (September 28, 2018) – More than 650 culinary arts students from 25 area public high schools will sharpen their knives and their job skills for the fifth annual **Culinary Arts Career Conference** hosted by the **Austin Food & Wine Alliance** on Thursday, Oct. 4, at Palmer Events Center.

Dozens of local entrepreneurs, businesses, chefs, artisan producers, food writers, and other culinary professionals will participate in the day-long conference that includes interactive cooking competitions, panel discussions, and a culinary expo—all offering the high school students a snapshot of the diverse culinary careers open to them in Central Texas, as well as insight into how to pursue those careers.

The Culinary Arts Career Conference, started in 2013 as a key tenet of the Austin Food & Wine Alliance's philanthropic mission to provide education and innovation in the culinary community, is among the first of its kind dedicated to high school students seeking jobs in the food industry. The conference is offered at no cost to students, schools, or school districts as a result of the nonprofit's successful fundraising events and sponsorships.

The Alliance will welcome high school students from 25 Central Texas high schools, including Academy, Austin, Belton, Burnet, Cedar Ridge, College Station, East View, Georgetown, Glenn, Hutto, Hays, John Jay, Connally, Lampasas, Liberty Hill, Lockhart, Marshall, Rouse, Samuel Clemens, San Marcos, Steele, Temple, Texas School for the Deaf, Travis, and Taft.

"As part of the education mission of the Austin Food & Wine Alliance, we want to extend our reach to area high school students who are already passionate about a culinary career," said Mariam Parker, Alliance executive director. "Our goal is to provide them with an opportunity to learn about and gain inspiration from the diversity in career paths in the culinary world as exemplified by Austin's culinary professionals."

As part of the conference, students will compete in five culinary competitions presented by Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts with first- through third-place winners receiving a total of \$18,000 in scholarships to the school. Competitions include Mystery Basket, Knife Skills, French Omelette, Dessert Decorating, and Fruit & Vegetable Carving.

Lending inspiration and guidance will be keynote speaker **Alejandro Velez, co-founder of Back to the Roots**, a thriving business on a mission to undo food and reconnect families to it through fun, innovative, and delicious ready-to-grow and ready-to-eat products. Back to the Roots was founded in 2009 by then college seniors Velez and Nikhil Arora after discovering how to grow gourmet mushrooms on recycled coffee grounds. Back to the Roots currently sells its products in more than 14,000 stores worldwide, including Whole Foods Market and many other prominent retailers.

Alejandro and Nikhil have been honored with several awards recognizing their efforts in sustainability and entrepreneurship, including *BusinessWeek's* "Top 25 Entrepreneurs under 25," *Inc.'s* "30 Under 30," *Inc. 500*, *Forbes'* "30 Under 30," and CNN's "10 Next Entrepreneurs to Watch." In addition, Back to the Roots was named a 2013 Martha Stewart Top Ten American Made honoree and recognized by President Obama as Champions of Change.

The conference features culinary pros and entrepreneurs who will offer seven panels to provide valuable insight to the students on career choices. Topics include tips for success in the workplace, pursuing unconventional culinary dream jobs, discovering the ins and outs of the food truck business and making the move from four wheels to four walls, exploring food trends that are shaping the culinary world, insights into battling food waste, and gaining an insider view on what it takes to be a chef for a chain of restaurants.

"We're so thrilled by the amazing support we've received from the local community," said Rachel Malish, Alliance board secretary and committee chair for the Culinary Arts Career Conference. "This is such an incredible opportunity for these students, and we're excited to provide a day devoted to inspiring them and sharing the expertise of Austin's top culinary professionals."

In addition to the participation of individual members of the local food community, the conference has attracted sponsorship support from **Whole Foods Market, Sysco, FreshPoint, Giant Noise, Premiere Events, ABC Bank, Fairmont Austin, Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts, Texas Restaurant Association, Texas Restaurant Association Education Foundation, Consumable Content, Texas Beef Council, Ace Mart Restaurant Supply, CultureMap, Hail Merry, Clif Bar & Company, Topo Chico, Cuvée Coffee, Good Pop, Hubert's Lemonade, Tacodeli, and Freeman.**

The Austin Food and Wine Alliance hosts engaging culinary events throughout the year **to raise funds for the Culinary Arts Career Conference and the organization's grant program, which is the nation's first grant program based on culinary innovation and community giveback.** Since 2012, AFWA has awarded **\$192,500 in grants** to fund a variety of unique culinary endeavors.

AFWA is the designated beneficiary of the [Austin Food + Wine Festival](#), a three-day tribute to world-renowned chefs and winemakers held each spring.

For more information on sponsorship and volunteer opportunities, visit AustinFoodWineAlliance.org, call 512.348.6847, or email Info@AustinFoodWineAlliance.org. Stay up to date with Austin Food & Wine Alliance happenings on Facebook <http://facebook.com/austinfoodwinealliance> and Twitter <http://twitter.com/ATXFoodWineAlly>.

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The Austin Food & Wine Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering awareness and innovation in the Central Texas culinary community through grants, educational programming, and events. Guided by an all-volunteer board of directors and committees made up of culinary-and-community-minded professionals, the Alliance's commitment is to promote Texas food, wine, spirits, and craft brews and to increase appreciation of Texas' culinary impact. The AFWA is the designated beneficiary of the [Austin Food + Wine Festival](#). For more information about the Austin Food & Wine Alliance, visit AustinFoodWineAlliance.org.