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COLORADO PROSTART® STUDENT INVITATIONAL ANNOUNCES WINNING HIGH SCHOOL TEAMS

Odyssey Early College and ThunderRidge High School Will Represent Colorado at National Invitational

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Denver, Colorado – On March 16, 2023, The Colorado Restaurant Foundation (CRF) held its annual Colorado ProStart® Student Invitational, a competition showcasing the culinary arts and restaurant management skills of high school juniors and seniors from across Colorado. Fourteen high schools competed, and nearly 100 students were ready in chef coats and management uniforms for the 7 a.m. check-in at the Gaylord Rockies Resort & Convention Center (6700 N. Gaylord Rockies Avenue, Aurora).

The culinary competition began at 8 a.m., with the teams each presenting an original appetizer, entrée, and dessert to a panel of judges comprising chefs, bakers, culinary instructors, restaurateurs, and other industry professionals. Among the judges was Penelope Wong, chef and owner of the Yuan Wonton food truck and 2023 James Beard Award semifinalist for Best Chef: Mountain.

Several of the high schools also competed in the Management competition, in which teams created a concept and presented menus, food costing, marketing, and other entrepreneurial aspects of running a business to a separate panel of judges. Food plating and management presentations continued until 4:30 p.m., after which the winners were announced. The top three teams in each category were awarded prizes, medals, and scholarships, and the Sysco Hospitality Cup traveling trophy was awarded to the high school with the top combined culinary and management scores.

The gold-medal teams in the culinary and management competitions will travel to Washington, D.C., to compete in the National ProStart Student Invitation from May 2 to 4, 2023. The medalists in the culinary and management categories will also receive scholarships from several post-secondary hospitality schools, including the Culinary Institute of America, the Culinary Institute of Virginia, Metropolitan State University of Denver, and the University of Denver Fritz Knoebel School of Hospitality Management.

“It’s such a thrill to see so many high school teams dedicate themselves to mastering culinary techniques and learning restaurant management skills at such a high level,” said CRF president Laura Shunk. “The Invitational gives Colorado ProStart students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in the heat of competition, which will help them immensely as they continue their education and enter the workforce. We’re so proud of all of them!”

Here’s a complete list of the winning teams:

Culinary Competition:

Gold: Odyssey Early College and Career Options High School, Colorado Springs

Silver: Smoky Hill High School, Aurora

Bronze: Career Elevation and Technology Center, Longmont

Management Competition:



Gold: ThunderRidge High School, Highlands Ranch
Silver: Smoky Hill High School, Aurora
Bronze: Westminster High School, Westminster

Hospitality Cup: ThunderRidge High School, Highlands Ranch.

ThunderRidge High School is the repeat winner of both the Management Competition and the Hospitality Cup, having won both in 2022.

This was the 22nd annual Colorado ProStart Student Invitational (the event was not held in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

Please contact Mark Antonation at mantonation@corestaurant.org if you would like photographs from the event, contact information for the participating Colorado ProStart[®] teachers, or other additional information.

About us:

*Established in 1987, the **Colorado Restaurant Foundation (CRF)** is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization governed by a board of directors made up of restaurants, industry experts, K-12, and post-secondary hospitality educators. As the philanthropic foundation of the Colorado Restaurant Association, the CRF's mission is the training of all individuals in the foodservice industry and those individuals entering the industry.*

***Colorado ProStart[®]** is a high school hospitality education program of the Colorado Restaurant Foundation, Colorado Restaurant Association, and the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation. The program offers a restaurant/hospitality management, culinary arts, and business economics curriculum to juniors and seniors, and provides high school and college academic credit, scholarships, and paid work experience opportunities for students.*