

School Daze

By Joseph M. Carbonara, Editor-in-Chief -- Foodservice Equipment & Supplies, 2/1/2007

Cultivating a deep and skilled pool of potential foodservice professionals seemingly is a universal need for this industry. From operators to manufacturers and all points in between, each member of the industry continues to look for that secret formula that will help them solve present and future employment needs on an individual basis. While these efforts go to great lengths to help meet individual corporate needs, they do little to address the challenge the industry at-large faces.



[Joseph Carbonara](#)

For the foodservice community to cultivate the talented professionals that will shape this industry for generations to come, it must do so collectively and not individually. Several years ago, the North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers took the first steps forward in this area when it started NAFEM Equipment and Supplies Education at Purdue University. Newer to the industry is New York City's Food and Finance High School.

Labeled a "New Century High School," Food and Finance High School got its start three years ago with a mission to create lifelong learners and prepare students for college and careers in culinary arts and foodservice, says Jessica Mates, director of high school programs for Food Change, the non-profit organization managing Food and Finance High School.

"We mean that broadly," Mates says of the school's mission. "Sure, we want to teach them to cook but we also want them to know the business side." That's why part of the school's curriculum calls for students to prepare a business plan for opening a foodservice operation. In addition, the school is developing a bakery/café concept of its own that students will manage and operate. "We are hoping that they will get a better idea of what goes into developing a business plan and business," Mates says.

The building housing the school was built in 1979 as a state-of-the-art culinary high school, with 18 glistening teaching kitchens. Over the years, those kitchens and the equipment they house have fallen into a state of disrepair and the school's intent is to rehab 10 of them into working culinary classrooms.

Next spring, Food and Finance High School will present its first graduating class to New York City and the foodservice industry. Armed with a high school diploma and a baseline of knowledge of the foodservice industry, these students represent the school's first steps at helping populate the pool of future foodservice professionals. "We are helping to develop and train the next generation of professionals," Mates says.

The school remains an intriguing option for students, with an estimated 530 New York City eighth graders applying for roughly 110 places in next fall's freshman class. Now, the challenge for Mates is to build awareness in the foodservice community and help generate additional support in the form of internships, donations and the like. "We are well-received once people find out about us," Mates says.

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Thanks to a partnership with the Black Culinarian Alliance, which has taken the school under its wing, awareness of Food and Finance High School is on the rise. In fact, the tour I participated in had representation from all segments of the industry, including operators, consultants, dealers, manufacturers and more.

From the outside, Food and Finance High School looks like most any other New York school. But inside, the potential seems to stretch as far as any of the young minds enrolled there will be allowed to take it. Unleashing that potential could flood the industry's pool with talent on a local level and serve as a grassroots-style blueprint for generations to come.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe Carbonara". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

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