

Young chefs get kitchen prep from Black Culinary Alliance

BY ROSEMARY BLACK

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They dream of winning cooking contests, hosting their own Food Network show or opening a four-star restaurant. And for young people like Sharada Winston, that dream may just come true. Two years ago, the 31-year-old Brooklyn hairstylist decided to enroll in culinary school. When she was a student at the Art Institute of New York, the Black Culinary Alliance invited her to be in a Caribbean cooking contest. She won first prize for her shrimp escovitch, and next month flies to Jamaica for a weeklong chef's internship. After that, the single mom hopes to land her first job as a professional chef.

"It's been very helpful for my career to have the BCA behind me," says Winston. "They offered guidance and advice. My ultimate goal is to have my own TV cooking show."

"Students volunteer their time at the event," says Eric Basulto, the brand new executive chef at Havana Central, who'll supervise the preparation of the roast pork and the rice with black beans. "It's very hands-on. The students will marinate the meat, learn about portion size, serve the food. We'll prep hundreds of tasting portions tomorrow, and we like to get these energetic students involved."

Volunteer work in the kitchen is important for a young chef, as Raymond Watson learned. When a friend suggested that he call the BCA when he was a student at the Institute of Culinary Education, he got involved with the group and soon began helping out with wine and cheese events. Before long, he became a member.

"My involvement with BCA has exposed me to so many people, and I've met so many different chefs," says Watson, who lives in Brooklyn and now works as a chef at the Fairfield Inn Marriott in Queens. "I learned so much and gained so much experience. BCA is actually a network that empowers young chefs."

Among the young chefs who've been mentored by the BCA is Stephanie Douglas, 46, who won first prize in a BCA-sponsored cooking contest for her duck in mango and guava sauce, and who now works as food service manager at Sodexo Dining Services in Morristown.

"The BCA opens up doors for young people just starting out," Douglas says. "It gives the students exposure into the real culinary world."

Besides helping culinary students of color find internships in restaurants, the BCA strives to teach up-and-coming young chefs the importance of eating locally and seasonally.

"If you ask a young person of color when was the last time they had a good turnip green, they look at you as if you had four heads," says Alex Askew, president of BCA. "We want young chefs to learn the importance of eating with the seasons."

Among the restaurants that will be represented at tomorrow night's gala is Havana Central, which will serve roast pork and steamed yucca, among other dishes. The event is open to the public and tickets are \$100 in advance and \$125 at the door. To order tickets online, visit www.ticketannex.com.

Roast Pork (Pernil Asado)

Serves 4

From Havana Central.

1/2 cup olive oil
3 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
Dash of garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon oregano
Pinch of black pepper
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 tablespoons white vinegar
1 tablespoon lime juice
6 garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
1 tablespoon manzanilla olives
1 1/2 tablespoons diced pimiento
2 onions, peeled and thinly sliced
3 1/2 pounds pork butt or shoulder