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CONTACT

Sally Zarafonetis

Media Consultant

(616) 656-5885

szarafonetis@gmail.com

EXPERIENCE GRAND RAPIDS ANNOUNCES FINAL RESULTS FOR RESTAURANT WEEK GRAND RAPIDS 2017

Students from Secchia Institute for Culinary Education at GRCC were awarded scholarships from a scholarship fund established by Restaurant Week GR

GRAND RAPIDS, MI (October 10, 2017) – Experience Grand Rapids hosted a presentation and lunch celebration today to announce the Restaurant Week Grand Rapids (RWGR) 2017 donation to the Secchia Institute for Culinary Education (SICE) Student Scholarship Fund at GRCC.

In 2017, there were 70+ participating restaurants that donated \$1 for every Restaurant Week meal sold. Since 2010, Restaurant Week participating restaurants and sponsors have contributed over \$126,906 to the scholarship fund. This year, a check totaling \$16,200 was presented to the GRCC Foundation, growing the RWGR donation to \$143,106.

Accepting the check on behalf of the Grand Rapids Community College Foundation were GRCC President Bill Pink and GRCC Foundation Executive Director Kathy Mullins. Dr. Pink also presented scholarships to seven students. Each scholarship winner received \$1,000 to help support their continuing studies in GRCC's SICE program. This is the seventh year that students have been awarded scholarship money from the fund established by Restaurant Week GR.

SICE Students who received 2017 RWGR scholarship awards include:

- **Amanda Barnett:** Amanda was an English teacher before pursuing a culinary career. Six years ago, she started an after-school cooking program for her students because many of them didn't have anything to eat in the evening. She loved the experience and last year, she finally made the leap to leave her full-time job and attend school. She says this scholarship will help her focus on her studies rather than how to pay for them. Amanda is now working at Brewery Vivant and her dream is to run an after-school cooking program and bake shop for youth.

- **Rachel Baas:** Rachel works in the bakeshop of six.one.six at the JW Marriott. She has fond memories of baking with her grandmother as a child, and making no-bake cookies with her dad, but it wasn't until her senior year of high school that she decided to pursue a culinary career. She plans to go on to earn a bachelor's degree from Ferris State University after she graduates from the Secchia Institute and she's grateful for scholarships like this that have helped her steer clear of student loans. She would love to open, manage and potentially run the foodservice portion of a bed-and-breakfast one day.
- **Edward Johnson Jr.:** Edward has wanted a culinary career since 2nd grade, when he began renting out cookbooks and begging his mom to help him make recipes. He currently works at CityFlatsHotel and dreams of traveling the world to learn different cooking styles. In the meantime, he says, the Restaurant Week scholarship will help him graduate more quickly.
- **Ashlie Herrmann:** Ashlie is working at Grove while she continues her schooling at the Secchia Institute. She says she may not have been able to go to school and accomplish her career goals without the generosity of others, including this scholarship. Her dream is to own a catering company with her mom and her best friend.
- **Jarrold Benjamin:** Jarrod has wanted to work in the culinary field since he was five years old and his ultimate goal is to become a personal chef. He currently works at Ruth's Chris Steakhouse while attending the Secchia institute. He says the school has afforded him many great opportunities and he's grateful for scholarships like this as he'd be unable to attend the school without them.
- **Kristina Kercher:** Kristina works at The Kitchen by Wolfgang Puck and also at Flo's Sports Bar in Belmont while she continues her education. She knew she wanted to work in the culinary field when she realized that you can make it if you work hard enough – something she learned from Chef James Powell, who she says didn't give up on her as she worked to get better. She appreciates this scholarship as a sign that people believe in her enough to help her reach her goals. Her dream is to become a chef with the creative freedom to make the foods she wants and get paid for it.
- **Jesse Aronoff:** Jesse says this scholarship is meaningful to him not just because it will help him further his education, but also because this year's Restaurant Week was "crazy." Jesse didn't have any ambition for a culinary career until he got his first job in the field at age 16. He currently works at Licari's Sicilian Pizza Kitchen and he can't narrow down his dreams for the future – he wants to do everything.

Restaurant Week GR took place from August 9 – 20, 2017. Over 70+ restaurants participated in the event this year. This was the 8th year for Restaurant Week GR which began in Greater Grand Rapids in 2010. Scholarships have been awarded each year since 2011.

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