

HIGH INTEREST IN WORCESTER REGIONAL FOOD HUB'S DIVERSE LEADERSHIP PROGRAM NECESSITATES INCREASE IN CAPACITY

By Shon Rainford, Worcester Regional Food Hub Director

There's no shortage of culinary creativity in the Heart of the Commonwealth – at least that's what the response to the Worcester Regional Food Hub's request for applications to its Launching Diverse Entrepreneurs in Worcester program indicates.

The Food Hub, in collaboration with the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce and The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, enrolled more than 20 participants in the first iteration of this food program in July.

An initiative aimed at increasing diverse representation among Worcester business owners, particularly those with a culinary focus, there was so much popularity in the program the number of open spots initially planned for by the Food Hub had to be increased.

More than 50 applications were received for the initial 20 positions, and the Food Hub enrolled 24 in the 16-week program.

Funded by the Massachusetts Office of Housing and Economic Development's Urban Agenda Grant, in addition to monies from The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, the program's goal is to jump start new food businesses in Worcester.

"This program is geared to introducing recipes handed down through generations to the main stream market and providing an opportunity for entrepreneurs to learn how to market their product efficiently and cost-effectively," said Alex Guardiola, director of government affairs and public policy, a Chamber staff member who helped secure the Urban Agenda Grant funds.

Selections were made by several community organization representatives, members of The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, the Food Hub, the City of Worcester, and the Chamber.

Run by Food Hub leadership, the program stretches from July through October with participants attending weekly sessions at Greendale People's Church, home of the Food Hub and commercial kitchen. These sessions will focus on culinary skills, food safety, business planning, sales, branding, accounting, and insurance information.

ServSafe manager and allergen awareness certifications, food permits, and liability insurance will also be rolled into the program.

In addition, guest speakers during the four-month curriculum will include Peter Dunn, assistant chief development officer from the City of Worcester; Ellen Nylen, food service

director at Webster Public Schools; Cheryl Miller, senior business advisor and training director from Clark University's Massachusetts Small Business Development Center; Michelle Miller, Central Mass. director of the Center for Women & Enterprise; Travis Duda, owner of Hunchback Graphics; Allen Fletcher, founder and president of the Worcester Public Market; Patricia DeChristopher, attorney and owner of DeChristopher Law Office; and Julia Moriconi, owner of Mrs. Moriconi's Ltd.; among others.

Participants in the program will receive free use of the Food Hub's community kitchen as well as promotion of their business.

Designed to bolster a robust regional food system, the Food Hub's mission is to increase local food access and consumption as well as recruit, retain, and incubate local food entrepreneurs, collectively building healthy, sustainable, and just communities. The Worcester



ABOVE: Knife skills, among other culinary know-how, are taught to participants in the Worcester Regional Food Hub's Launching Diverse Entrepreneurs in Worcester program. Additional sessions will focus on food safety, sales, accounting, and insurance among other topics. Photo by Emily Gowdey-Backus.

Regional Food Hub is a proud partner of the Chamber and generously supported by The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts.