2014 ISHAE Awards of Excellence

Tennessee Hospitality & Tourism Education Foundation’s ProStart Program

1. Goals & Objectives of Program

The Tennessee Hospitality & Tourism Education Foundation was established to foster professional development and educational opportunities for the hospitality and tourism workforce. For us, an important part of fulfilling that mission begins in high school. The goal of the ProStart Program is to reach high school students and show them the career options available to them within the culinary and foodservice industry. We want reach the best and brightest students and cultivate the next generation of restaurant owners, executive chefs, catering professionals, industry executives, etc. Tennessee is becoming well-known across the country for our culinary excellence and diversity, and in order to ensure that our culinary industry continues to flourish and attract tourists and visitors to Tennessee, we have to reach talented young people early in their lives. In addition to educating students and getting them on a solid career track within the hospitality industry, we provide opportunities for them attain scholarships, professional certifications, and mentored work experience, ultimately leading them to be prepared for the workforce when they graduate high school and college. With the amount of preparation that ProStart students receive in high school, they graduate ready to excel in the industry.

At TnHTEF, we also believe that the state and our whole society benefit when we take care of our own. Our students deserve the opportunity to excel and reach their dreams in as many ways as possible. For many students, culinary arts and restaurant management have been the first subjects they’ve encountered in a school setting that have interested them and provided them with an opportunity to excel. Not every student is the same, and diversifying career and educational opportunities within high schools is the right thing to do for students and for our community. Many of our students have battled issues like poverty, homelessness, and a lack of parental involvement in their lives—ProStart is about showing them that they are capable of achieving a career which will allow them to provide for themselves and their families. ProStart provides an important resource to students by training them in the skills that will help them achieve professional, high-paying jobs regardless of whether or not they go on to pursue higher education. Additionally, because Tennessee’s culinary scene is growing so quickly and gaining national attention, it is important for us to remain on the cutting edge of the restaurant and hospitality industry. Particularly for a state with no income tax, our bread and butter is tax revenue, and there is no better stream of income than the spending that tourists and visitors do when they are in town. Without innovate, fun, and amazing restaurants, tourism starts to decline. That is why it is crucial to the economy of Tennessee for us to cultivate a new generation of chefs and restaurateurs who will bring a fresh perspective and immense talent to the industry and keep Tennessee in the national spotlight for years to come.

2. Target Audience

High school culinary arts teachers, the Tennessee Department of Education, Career and Technical Education Directors, high school students, college profressors, hospitality and tourism industry professionals, hiring managers of hospitality and tourism businesses, supporters of hospitality and tourism education.

3. Results of Program

Through a robust marketing and educational campaign, we have grown the ProStart program from 2 to 35 schools since 2011. Additionally, we have continually provided opportunities for the restaurant industry to be more involved with our schools and help make sure their programs are able to provide the kind of industry training and development that will help the students be competitive for the highest paying culinary and hospitality jobs in Tennessee. In 2012, we held our first TN ProStart Competition, which gave our students the opportunity to cook and create in front of some of the most renowned chefs and restaurateurs in the state. Colleges and universities took notice of our competition and supported our efforts through offering scholarships to each student on a 1st- 3rd place winning team. **In 2014, seven schools donated a cumulative total of $1,080,000 to the winners of our TN ProStart Competition.** Each student who placed 1st- 3rd at our competition walked about with scholarship offers from six to seven different schools. We are also able to send our first place teams to compete at the National ProStart Invitational each year, providing them an opportunity for industry exposure and learning that is unparalleled in the country. Through our marketing of ProStart and our efforts to make the program as beneficial to students as possible, we’ve been able to reach more and more students each year and prepare them to confidently and successfully reach their career goals within the industry.

4. Evaluation Measures

Through ProStart, we are able to reach hundreds of students across the state, showing them a path to achieving their career dreams. Along with classroom skills, ProStart stresses industry involvement and mentored work experience. TnHTEF pairs schools with local businesses who provide them with support, mentors, work experience, and training opportunities. ProStart students must attain 400 hours of mentored work experience to receive their ProStart Certification. ProStart Certified students have also achieved a mastery of each fundamental concept related to the foodservice industry, including extensive practicums on marketing, management, leadership, and all back-of-house and front-of-house related skills. As such, both employers and institutions of higher education have put a high demand on ProStart students. The amount of scholarship opportunities and high paying job offers afforded to our students encourages them to finish high school, go on to college, and to take stock of their career as it develops. Nationally, 81% of students who receive a ProStart Certificate of Achievement are still working or studying in the hospitality industry five years after graduating high school. This is an enormously helpful statistic, as it shows us that ProStart creates excitement about career opportunities and provides students with the skills and background necessary to attain a career in the field.

One of our favorite success stories is a program out of Sevier County. At Sevier County High School, the graduate rate is in the high 70s. Within the Sevier County ProStart Program, not only is the graduation rate 100%, but each and every student attends college ON SCHOLARHISP! Sevier County was our pilot ProStart program in Tennessee six years ago, and we are working hard to get all of our schools statewide to the same extremely high level of success that we’re seeing in our veteran programs like Sevier County.

5. How was the program presented to the Target Audience?

We conducted in-person meetings across the state with different stake holders, held a ProStart Teacher Training course for new and veteran educators, met with several school boards and the Department of Education, held a competition for our ProStart students, conducted a Scholarship Program through which we gave over $10,000 in cash scholarships, and continually called and emailed our 1600+ members of the Tennessee Hospitality & Tourism Association to encourage them to participate with our program by serving as mentors, hiring ProStart students, training teachers, fundraising, and training teams for competition.