



NEWS RELEASE

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KNOXVILLE CONVENTION CENTER HOSTS ABUNDANT LIFE KITCHEN GRADUATION

On July 10, 2009, the Knoxville Convention Center hosted a graduation ceremony for eight students who successfully completed 16 weeks of rigorous culinary training through the Abundant Life Kitchen program.

The moving ceremony included a surprise appearance by Food Network Executive Chef Rob Bleifer, who appeared via video link from the Iron Chef set in New York. In April, Bleifer came to Knoxville to work with the students and to help with a large fundraising dinner for the program.

The Abundant Life Kitchen program, established in May 2004, is operated through a partnership between Knox Area Rescue Ministries (KARM) and Second Harvest Food Bank. This graduating class marked the 12th class for the program. Each class includes about 10 students.

Chris Moore, Knoxville Convention Center executive chef, served as lead instructor for the program, marking the first time that someone other than a KARM employee took the helm. Moore was impressed with the determination of the students and the value of the program.

"These students showed a tremendous amount of commitment," said Moore. "Many of them came with a lot of challenges, but we worked with them so that they could overcome those obstacles and reach success."

In addition to lending the services of its executive chef to lead the program, the Knoxville Convention Center hosted the students five days a week for 13 weeks. Moore served as teacher and mentor to the students and became very invested in their success.

"I realized early on that working with the students would have to take place on a case-by-case basis," said Moore. "For some, it was their first experience showing up to work each day. Others were trying to hold down another job while completing the rigorous coursework."

Moore also praised the dedication of his staff, saying that the program involved hundreds of hours of work and required a lot of teamwork for everyone. He added that the program was a win-win situation. "The students were a big help to us during the months of

April, May and June. The Convention Center was exceptionally busy during those months, and the students provided much needed manpower."

Tracy Hicks, Knox Area Rescue Ministries director of operations, praised the staff of the Knoxville Convention Center for their dedication to the program. "Mary Bogert has been fabulous," said Hicks. "She really sees the benefit of the program to the entire community." Hicks was quick to add that the entire staff at the Convention Center was "wonderful to work with."

Applications are being accepted for the next class, which starts in August. For information about enrolling or supporting the program, contact Tracy Hicks at thicks@karm.org or 865-673-6540.

The Knoxville Convention Center, managed by SMG, is located in downtown Knoxville adjacent to the Sunsphere. It boasts an 119,922-square-foot exhibit hall, a 27,300-square-foot divisible ballroom and 18 meeting rooms. For more information, visit <http://www.knoxvilleconventioncenter.com>.

Headquartered in Philadelphia, SMG provides management services to over 200 public assembly facilities including arenas, stadiums, performing arts centers, theatres and convention, conference and trade centers. As the recognized industry leader since 1977, SMG provides construction and design consulting, pre-opening services, venue management, sales and marketing and event booking and programming. SMG also offers food and beverage operations through our in house catering company, Savor...catering by SMG, currently servicing 65 accounts worldwide. With facilities across the United States, and in Puerto Rico, Mexico, Canada, Europe and the Middle East, SMG controls over 1.5 million entertainment seats worldwide and manages more than ten million feet of exhibition space.

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Pictured from left to right: graduate Randy Brown, Chef Chris Moore and graduate Sherman Douglas.

