

Eastside High School culinary arts director named finalist for national award

After guiding her students to numerous awards and honors, Chef Pam Bedford has earned some national recognition herself.

Bedford, director of the Institute of Culinary Arts (ICA) at Eastside High School, has been named one of just four finalists for the 2021 Chef Educator of the Year Award, sponsored by the American Culinary Federation. According to the Federation's website, the award 'pays tribute to an active culinary educator whose knowledge, skills and expertise have enhanced the image of the professional chef and who, by example, has given leadership, guidance and direction to students seeking a career in the culinary profession.'



"These leaders have implemented strategies to ensure that their students gain the knowledge and skills they need for the workforce," said Casey Shiller, who was himself the National Chef Educator of the Year in 2012 and is now a judge for the program. "They also have shown how being nimble is critical to our career."

Chef Bedford certainly fits the award qualifications. In her 14 years with the program at EHS, including four years as director, Bedford has helped hundreds of students win awards, find jobs and earn career certification. She's also helped them win scholarships and admission to top culinary arts colleges. Many of her former students are now working in prestigious restaurant and hospitality settings nationwide.

One student who has benefited from Bedford's leadership is senior Cirius Brown. Just a few weeks ago, Brown won a medal at the Florida SKILLS USA Competition. She was also a member of the ICA team that was a finalist in last year's NASA Astronaut Culinary Challenge. She's currently working at the Original American Kitchen in downtown Gainesville, a job Bedford arranged for her.

This fall, Brown is headed to Johnson and Wales University, which boasts one of the premier culinary arts programs in the world.

"I love her so much, she's my favorite teacher and she's like a second mom," said Brown of Chef Bedford. "Everything she's taught me has made me a better person."

"She's an amazing teacher," said freshman Corbin Collins. "She helps us reach our full potential."

"I just do what the kids need," said Bedford. "Their success is my success. You just can't turn down their enthusiasm."

At the Federation's national conference in Orlando in August, Bedford and her fellow finalists will be giving chefs and educators throughout the nation a glimpse into their work by teaching and demonstrating the preparation of a fully-composed entrée or plated dessert.

"We're all going to be rooting for her," said Brown. "We couldn't be more proud."

####