

Epicurean Charitable Foundation's Melissa Arias: Supporting future industry leaders



BRYAN STEFFY / WIREIMAGE

Epicurean Charitable Foundation secretary and South Point's director of food operations Michael Kennedy stands with a few of the organization's scholars at this year's scholarship event MENUS on Friday, Oct. 4, 2013, at the Luxor.

By Melissa Arias

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Robin Leach has finished his annual summer vacation under the Tuscan sun in Italy, and many of our Strip personalities again stepped forward in his absence to pen their own words of wisdom. As Robin enjoys the remainder of his working vacation with his family, we continue today with our popular guest columns. Here is Melissa Arias, executive director of the Epicurean Charitable Foundation.

As the executive director of Epicurean Charitable Foundation of Las Vegas, I am honored to work with 25 of the most respected hospitality and food-and-beverage leaders in the industry who make up the ECF board. These dedicated men and women find time in their overwhelming schedules to support the foundation's charitable mission and serve as mentors for our city's future industry leaders.

ECF was founded in 2001 with the primary charitable endeavor of ensuring college scholarships to financially in-need Clark County high school seniors seeking careers in hospitality and the culinary



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arts. Scholarship recipients are awarded as much as \$33,000 if attending UNLV and as much as \$48,000 if choosing to pursue a related degree at another institute of higher learning.

ECF stands out not only by awarding scholarships, but also by providing each recipient with a mentor from the ECF board for the duration of his or her education. As part of the Future Leaders of Hospitality Program, the mentors provide students with academic assistance, personal guidance and professional experience unmatched among their peers.

I have seen firsthand the effect that ECF has on

local students. Our scholarship recipients are from a variety of backgrounds — from being temporarily homeless to having to care for two siblings at the age of 14 — but all share one thing in common: They are passionate about a career in hospitality but lack the financial means to do so on their own. ECF opens the door to possibility and provides invaluable guidance along the way.

To support the foundation, we host an annual dine-around event known as MENUS (Mentoring & Educating Nevada's Upcoming Students). We have worked tirelessly since the last event to secure the best venue, entertainment and dining experiences available and are very excited to announce this year's festivities.

MENUS 2014 will be held Friday, Oct. 17, at MGM Grand and feature an exclusive poolside dine-around followed by admission to a concert by three-time Grammy Award-winning country sensation Zac Brown Band at MGM Grand Garden Arena.

The ECF board is led by the executive committee: Jason Shkorupa, president of ECF and vice president of food and beverage for MGM Grand; Kelley Jones, ECF chairman of the board and partner at Trust3 Hospitality; Sean DiCicco, ECF vice president and vice president of food and beverage for Mandalay Bay; Ana Maria Mormando, ECF vice president and vice president of hotel operations for Bellagio; Rene Werner, ECF treasurer and director of food and beverage at the Orleans; and Michael Kennedy, ECF secretary and director of food operations at South Point.

Las Vegas is a city built on the hospitality industry, and the impact of ECF can be felt from the highest-ranking boardroom to the chalkboard of a local high school classroom. The members of the ECF board are not only supporting our community, but they also are helping to shape the future of the city's most prominent businesses.

Profiles of our brilliant students and board members, MENUS 2014 details and more information on how you can help make a difference are found at ECFLV.org and by following us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @EpicureanLV.

2013 MENUS at Luxor

