

Epicurean Charitable Foundation

By Leah Schmidt

Leah is a graduate of Purdue University where she studied Creative Writing with minors in French and Design. She enjoys reading, writing, and being outdoors. A Chicago native, she recently moved to Las Vegas and is excited to get a taste of all it has to offer!



Mentoring the Food & Beverage Professionals of the Future



Melissa Arias



Michael Kennedy



Ben Sison

photos courtesy Epicurean Charitable Foundation

The Epicurean Charitable Foundation was started in 2001 by a group of driven individuals. The board of directors is made up of some of the top food and beverage directors in the industry. With a mission to help students who are passionate about the hospitality industry, the Epicurean Charitable Foundation (ECF) grants scholarships to top local Clark County high school students that cover tuition, books and class fees. ECF is much more than just an organization that grants scholarships. Scholarship students are paired up with a different board member to serve as a mentor each year of their education. By having a different mentor each year, students get to learn from people in a variety of different positions throughout the hospitality industry, like food and beverage, HR, hotel operations, etc. Melissa Arias, the Executive Director of ECF and who has been involved with the organization for four years, explains the unique mentorship aspect of ECF.

“I think that’s what is so fantastic about ECF; it’s not just money towards a scholarship. You get to see how you impact day-to-day through mentorship and different etiquette and leadership training that can actually change the trajectory of the students’ lives.”

Although the mentors rotate and change each year, it’s important to note that previous mentors still stay in touch with old mentees. This gives students a strong network of individuals in the hospitality industry that they can always go to for advice or help in both their academic and professional careers.

Michael Kennedy, a board chairman and mentor who has been with ECF for six years, said, “I think the mentorship is the biggest differentiating factor of our organization from other scholarship foundations. We hope that this is similar to Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts once-a-scout always-a-scout kind of thing. We want alumni to come back, to stay engaged and pay it forward with the organization.”

One of Kennedy’s previous mentees, Ben Sison, is currently a junior at UNLV studying Hospitality Management with a concentration in Meetings and Events. He also currently works at the Silverado Steakhouse at South Point Hotel and Casino. Sison stressed how ECF

has helped him educationally and professionally, and the advantage he has from being part of the ECF family.

“I have a family with ECF. Educationally, I realize what an advantage I have over other students not involved with ECF. For my professional career, any advice I need my mentor(s) can help. They help create a lot of opportunities for you as well. Last summer, Michael helped me participate in a work-rotation internship where every week I got to work with a different department. It opened my eyes to the entire industry and every part of it.”

Sison is just one of the many students that ECF has helped guide through the hospitality industry. Many graduated students are now working at top hotels and restaurants throughout Las Vegas and each continue to participate with ECF. One alumnus even recently joined the board of directors.

Every fall, ECF hosts its biggest event and gala of the year. On October 13 M.E.N.U.S. (Mentoring and Educating Nevada’s Upcoming Students) will take place at the Hard Rock and is Havana themed. A pool-side dine-around experience, guests will enjoy food from 25-28 outstanding Las Vegas restaurants and drink stations, along with a silent auction. Students get to participate in the planning for this event, and also get to use it as a chance to network with food and beverage professionals.

Kennedy stressed the importance of the M.E.N.U.S. Gala, stating that, “The more money we raise, the more scholarships we give and the more lives we affect.”

ECF is an incredible foundation with the experience and opportunities it gives the students, and the passionate people behind the mission. ECF keeps evolving and working towards becoming the strongest foundation it can be to help guide the future leaders of the hospitality industry.

For more information on this year’s M.E.N.U.S. Gala and to purchase tickets, visit ecflv.org/m-e-n-u-s/m-e-n-u-s-2017.