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## **Chefs Compete at 2nd Annual “Top Chef of Polk County” Benefitting Achievement Academy**

**LAKELAND, FL (April 20, 2016)** Achievement Academy’s second annual “Top Chef of Polk County” event took place on Monday, April 18, at the Lakeland Center. The event was a huge success, and raised double what it made last year at \$52,943 for children of Achievement Academy.

Top Chef of Polk County is a five-course fine-dining experience that places the spotlight on the area’s leading chefs while raising funds for programs and therapies for the children of Achievement Academy. The Master Chef Sponsor for the event was Publix Super Markets Charities and the Executive Chef Sponsors were the Ledger Media Group and Hall Communications.

A total of 10 chefs created and prepared, tableside, their own menu with accompanying wine and libations that complemented the flavors of each course. An Expert Panel of culinary-trained chefs judged each chef on their creations based on presentation, choice and taste of food. This Expert Panel included Chef Rene J. Marquis, CEC–Certified Executive Chef, CCE-Certified Culinary Educator, CCA-Certified Culinary Administrator, ACE-Approved Culinary Evaluator, AAC-American Academy of Chefs, who also appeared on Food Network’s “Cutthroat Kitchen”; Chef Michael Moench, CEC, M.S.Ed., Dean at Keiser University’s Sarasota Campus and the University Department Chair for Curriculum at all Keiser University Center for Culinary Arts and Chef Adam Walkover, AS Culinary Arts, ACF Certified Culinarian, GFS Emerging Leaders Program, who uses his years of chef experience now as a Marketing Specialist and Consulting Chef for Gordon Food Services.

Chef Ronald Mayer of Florida Presbyterian Homes was crowned “Top Chef of Polk County 2016” for the second year in a row. The Expert Panel of judges awarded Frescos for best in Appetizer, Nineteen61 for best in Entrée and Grasslands Golf & Country Club for best in Dessert. The Media Panel of Judges included Wes Craven of Pro-Ad Media, Nancy Cattarius of Hall Communications, and Kevin Drake of the Ledger Media Group. Chef Jose Vicente of Brasa Latina was awarded “Media’s Choice — Top Chef 2016.” The Media Panel of judges awarded Grasslands Golf & Country Club for best in Appetizer, Nineteen61 for best in Entrée and Brasa Latina for best in Dessert. Dinner guests voted Whiskey Bent BBQ the “Best Table Décor” award. Chef Tina Calhoon of Frescos raised the most funds for Achievement Academy through donated auction items and was awarded the “Top Philanthropic Chef” award.

The Chef participants for this year’s event were:

Chef Steve Beltz, Grasslands Golf & Country Club

Chef Tina Calhoon, Frescos Bakery & Bistro

Chef Tina Calhoon, Whisky Green

Chef Marcos Fernandez, Nineteen61

Chef Terry Gracie, Publix Aprons Cooking School

Chef Wayne Haggard, Spectra Food Services

Chef Ronald Mayer, Florida Presbyterian Homes (Reigning Top Chef of Polk County)

Chef Jose Vicente, Brasa Latina

Chef Chad Ward, Whiskey Bent BBQ

Chef Chris Worley, Terrie Lobb Catering

Next year’s “Top Chef of Polk County” event will take place on Monday, April 10, 2017 at the Lakeland Center.

For more information or to see pictures from this year’s event, visit the Achievement Academy website, <http://achievementacademy.com/top-chef-of-polk-county-2016/>, or call (863) 683 6504.



(L-R) Achievement Academy Development Director, Stacy Williams, CFRE; “Top Chef of Polk County 2016” winner, Chef Ron Mayer of Florida Presbyterian homes; Achievement Academy Principal, Cindi Parker-Pearson, Florida Presbyterian Homes Director of Dining Services/Executive Chef, Russell Colleran; and Achievement Academy Executive Director, John Burton.

*The Achievement Academy serves children from birth through age five with various developmental delays and disabilities. The Achievement Academy offers two programs, each provided at no cost to the child or family. The first program is a **Charter School** that offers specialized instruction by certified teachers; small class sizes; individual speech, occupational and physical therapies; and assistive technologies that enable each student to reach his or her full potential at one of the Achievement Academy’s three campus locations (Lakeland, Winter Haven and Bartow). The second is a "**Birth to Three Program**" that provides early intervention services to infants and toddlers who are "at-risk" for developmental delays and/or have been identified with a specific delay. Professional Early Interventionists serve these children and their families. More than half of the Birth to Three Program’s budget is funded by a generous allocation from the United Way of Central Florida.*

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