



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Eighth Annual Top Chef of Polk County Event
Held to Benefit Achievement Academy**

LAKELAND, FL (March 2, 2022) - Nine chefs hosted sponsors, guests, and community leaders at their respective restaurants on February 28th for a three-course meal with pairings in support of Achievement Academy's eighth annual Top Chef of Polk County! With the community's support, this year's event proved to be our most successful yet, raising \$230,000 that will benefit the children served through Achievement Academy programs!

The team of judges consisted of Chef Darci Kropp, Chef Arielle Hirsch, and Chef Adam Walkover who tasted each chef's signature dish and scored them on criteria including taste, texture, creativity, and balance, among others. Congratulations to Chef Lucy Cortes-Castaneda, Red Door Lakeland, for winning the coveted title of Top Chef of Polk County with her masterpiece that included homemade ricotta dumplings, braised rabbit, rutabaga puree, seared rabbit saddle, and elephant garlic chips. Chef Nicolas Mut, Terrace Grille, took home the award for Most Creative Chef for his use of the mystery ingredient, a new award this year.

Pat Spinosa, AgAmerica Lending, and Chef Cem Demirhan secured the highly sought after recognition as our Top Philanthropic team, raising nearly \$70,000 for our programs. All of our Chefs and Community Leader teams did an outstanding job with their fundraising efforts, collectively raising more than \$130,000!

Our deepest appreciation to this year's participating chefs and their community leaders:

Chef Brandon Bailey, Lakeland BBQ Company and Caitlyn Salters, Exxact Transport

Chef Tina Calhoon, Frescos Southern Kitchen & Bar and Danielle Harris & Dawn Lyons, Bank of Central Florida

Chef Lucy Cortes-Castaneda, Red Door Lakeland and Par Sahota, Boring Business Systems

Chef Cem Demirhan, Nineteen61 and Pat Spinosa & Mac Miller, AgAmerica Lending

Chef Jason Ellis, Cob & Pen and Kyle Kilburn, Gate Arty & the Group - Keller Williams Realty

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Chef Gene Gelb, Publix Aprons Cooking School and Catering and Emily Topper, Publix Super Markets, Inc.

Chef Nicolas Mut, The Terrace Grille and Barbara McMickle, The Terrace Hotel Lakeland, Tapestry Collection by Hilton

Chef Abigale Weech-Starkey, The Chop Shop and Alexandra Lee, Citizens Bank & Trust

Chef Chris Worley and Chef Terrie Lobb, Terrie Lobb Catering, Inc. and Adam Riley, Ewing, Blackwelder & Duce Insurance.

Publix Super Markets Charities was the Exclusive Presenting sponsor, joined by Artistic General Contracting as the Master Chef Sponsor. Head Chef Sponsors include Hillcrest Partners Limited Partnership, MIDFLORIDA Credit Union, Pallet Recycle, and Steve and Janice Jones. Sous Chef Sponsors are Citizens Bank & Trust, Lakeland Surgical & Diagnostic Center, LLC, The Heritage Group at Morgan Stanley, and Senator Kelli Stargel. Dessert Sponsors are Interstate Batteries of Lakeland, John and Deborah Weber, Luke Markham and the law firm of Johnson Pope, and Mulling Insurance Agency, Inc. Sauté Chef Sponsors are Alexander and Chandra Frederick, CPS Investment Advisors, David and Shi Adams, DSM Technology Consultants, Lakeland Electric, Payne Air Conditioning & Heating, Inc., Polk State College Foundation, Prime Meridian Bank, Saddle Creek Logistics Services, Summit Consulting, LLC, and Valley Bank.

*For more than 65 years, the Achievement Academy has been serving children from birth through age five with various developmental delays and disabilities. Achievement Academy offers two programs, each provided at no cost to the child or family. The **Birth to Three** program provides early intervention services to infants and toddlers who are “at-risk” for developmental delays and/or have been diagnosed with a specific challenge. Professional Early Interventionists serve these children and their families in the child’s home. The **ESE Charter Pre-Kindergarten** 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.) For more information, please visit AchievementAcademy.com or call 863-683-6504.*

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Chef Lucy Cortes-Castaneda with Red Door Lakeland accepts the 2022 Top Chef of Polk County Award!
Pictured left to right are Lucy Cortes-Castaneda and Richard DeAngelis.



Community Leader Pat Spinosa with AgAmerica Lending, and Chef Cem Demirhan with Nineteen61, accepts the 2022 Top Philanthropic Award!
Pictured left to right are Pat Spinosa, Chef Cem Demirhan, Kristin Aiken.



Chef Lucy Cortes-Castaneda's winning signature dish.



Chef Nicolas Mut with The Terrace Hotel accepts the 2022 Most Creative Chef Award for his use of the mystery ingredient!
Pictured left to right are Chef Nicolas Mut and Kristin Aiken.