



Media Contact:
Szilvia Szegedi
Marketing & Communications Manager, MFHA
401.461.6344
szilvia.szegedi@mfha.net

Local Entrepreneur Brings Inspirational Career Event to Johnson & Wales Students

Climbing the ladder: Hearing it from those who have made it to the top

Providence, RI (Mar. 19, 2010) — Gerry Fernandez, founder and president of the Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance (MFHA) started out like many of the attendees of Thursday’s Showcase of the Stars™ event – working in a restaurant.

Just like them, Gerry Fernandez didn’t begin his career on top. He had to work his way up from waiter to management. For more than 10 years, Fernandez worked as a senior manager opening and operating fine dining restaurants in Rhode Island including The Capital Grille and Hemenway’s Seafood Grill & Oyster Bar.

Though fired from one of his first jobs, Fernandez never gave up pursuing his dream of making a difference in the hospitality business. Fernandez remained determined, and with time, found a positive outcome to what was a negative situation. “Looking back, in a big picture sense, I can say now that I’m glad I got fired, because it showed me that I had to take a good look at myself and take responsibility for my own actions,” he said at the Showcase event on Thursday.

In 1992, Fernandez began his career at General Mills in research and development. “I took a big risk,” he said, telling students he moved his whole family from Providence to Minneapolis to begin a career in the corporate world, something he had never done before. But that risk, “turned out to be one of the best risks I’ve taken,” he said.

In 1996, taking a leave of absence from General Mills, Fernandez took another great risk to start up MFHA. “It was always about helping the industry and never just about finding a job,” he said. Today, Fernandez not only stands out as an example for the future workforce in the food and hospitality industry, but he has made it his life long mission to inspire and motivate students to pursue careers in the industry.

MFHA’s Showcase of the Stars™ program began promoting the vast career opportunities in the industry in 2000 and since its inception, has been featured in 22 cities nationally and has reached over 10,000 students.

Over 275 Johnson & Wales University students attended the events held on Thursday, March 18, from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. and again from 12:30 to 2:00 p.m. Showcase is a live, in-person career exploration event executed in a panel format.

The event allows students the opportunity to ask pressing questions, meet professionals who are successful leaders in some of the industry's top companies, and gain insight into the world of food and hospitality – insight that they made have not previously had.

“This event made me realize how widespread and diverse the industry is,” said Tamier Pemberton, a junior in the Food Service Management program.

Caitlin Dwyer, a junior in Food Service Management said the event, “Helped me realize that people above you really want to help. They want us to succeed.”

For some, it was eye-opening: “It made me realize that I don't want to be in a leadership position at this time in my life, and that is probably good because it gives me time to learn a company,” said Jason Alvarez, a student majoring in Culinary Arts and Food Service Management.

Panelists at this Showcase included: Joe Cacciatore, Food Service Director, **ARAMARK**; Mike Grey, Vice President Operations, **Sodexo**; Suzanne Fredericks, Director of Food Service, **Morrison Management Specialists**; Frank Lewis, Business Development Manager, **PepsiCo Foodservice**; and Fred Soykan, Human Resources Consultant, **McDonald's Corporation**.

Coinciding with Showcase of the Stars™ was a career fair at Johnson & Wales, giving students a great opportunity to further network and learn more about available employment opportunities in the industry.

To learn more about the Showcase of the Stars™ program and to find out about upcoming events, visit www.mfha.net.

The Multicultural Foodservice & Hospitality Alliance's (MFHA) Showcase of the Stars™

MFHA's mission is to bring the benefits of cultural diversity to the food and hospitality industry by building bridges that deliver solutions. MFHA provides diversity resources, events and programs including *Showcase of the Stars™*. This program is a live, in person career exploration event that promotes careers in the food and hospitality industry. The primary audience is diverse high school and college students, as well as adult professionals transitioning to new careers. For more information, visit www.mfha.net.

###