



BONITA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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NEWS RELEASE

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Bonita Unified ProStart Culinary Students Display Skills at ‘The Grateful Table’ Fundraiser

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – Bonita Unified ProStart culinary students rubbed elbows with some of the top executive chefs and restaurateurs in the state as they displayed their award-winning skills at the California Restaurant Foundation’s (CRF) biggest fundraiser of the year, The Grateful Table, which raised nearly \$300,000 to support California Cares, a relief fund for California restaurant workers.

Held in September at the Del Mar Racetrack, The Grateful Table saw ProStart students from San Dimas and Bonita high schools work side by side with many renowned California chefs, including guest of honor Guy Fieri, to prepare a gourmet meal while BUSD ProStart alumni worked the front of the house, providing an exquisite experience for the event’s VIP guests and donors. San Dimas and Bonita were the only schools chosen to participate in this year’s event.

“Together, our ProStart students helped create and serve an unforgettable dining experience for this special gathering of California restaurant legends,” San Dimas ProStart teacher Nick Brandler said. “The professionalism, skill, and enthusiasm they demonstrated made us extremely proud, and it was clear they left a lasting impression on everyone they encountered.”

BUSD ProStart students immersed themselves in an environment that represented the highest level of the industry, where they made connections and saw firsthand the standards of excellence that define hospitality. Fieri, who received the CRF’s “Heart of Hospitality” award, was one of the many chefs who took time to speak with the students, inspiring them with a motivational message.

“I had a great time preparing and making food,” Bonita High junior Bishop Ramirez said. “Big thanks to all the chefs, especially Chef Phillip Esteban. They really allowed us to learn from their years of experience, and in return granted us access to new opportunities. It was a wonderful training. Thank you to the California Restaurant Foundation.”

Bonita Unified’s ProStart program has grown exponentially since its inception at the beginning of the 2016-17 school year. Led by the husband-and-wife team of Nick and Laurie Brandler – who joined the District in 2015 and 2006, respectively, and teach at San Dimas and Bonita high schools – the program has dominated ProStart competitions in recent years.

MORE



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San Dimas High is the reigning ProStart national champion, capturing the title in May after becoming BUSD's second consecutive state champion, following Bonita High's victory at the California ProStart Cup in 2024. San Dimas senior Kyle Yamate, a member of the national championship team and current ProStart captain for the 2025-26 school year, said he appreciated getting the opportunity to experience the Grateful Table and learn from professionals.

"I had such a great time at the Grateful Table," Yamate said. "It fully opened my eyes to the culinary field and allowed me to work with so many talented chefs."

Other notable achievements for the ProStart program this year include its participation in the CRF's annual Culinary Clash fundraiser over the summer, which raised \$95,000 for California high school culinary programs, and the EcoLab Sunday Night Spotlight "Bites & Beats" competition, which saw Bonita High alumna Charli Padilla team up with Bonita High junior Abby Brandler to create a food truck concept, "The Flip Side," one of just two culinary teams in the country to be featured as part of the National Restaurant Foundation event.

"We are so proud to see our students connect with the very best chefs in the state and participate in events that inspire them to create and innovate at the highest levels," Laurie Brandler said. "Thank you to the CRF for all they have done to help our students in being the best they can be, and the District community for being so supportive of our program."

PHOTOS

BUSD_GRATEFULTABLE1: ProStart students and alumni from Bonita and San Dimas high schools meet guest of honor Guy Fieri after preparing gourmet meals for attendees at the California Restaurant Foundation's (CRF) biggest fundraiser of the year, The Grateful Table.

BUSD_GRATEFULTABLE2: San Dimas High School senior Kyle Yamate perfects plated dishes before they are served to guests at CRF's The Grateful Table fundraiser.

BUSD_GRATEFULTABLE3: Bonita Unified ProStart students and alumni meet chef Jet Tila after preparing meals for The Grateful Table fundraiser, held at Del Mar Racetrack.

BUSD_GRATEFULTABLE4: Working alongside professional chefs, Bonita Unified ProStart culinary students plate dishes at the CRF's The Grateful Table fundraiser as San Dimas High ProStart instructor Nick Brandler supervises.