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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Nov. 10, 2026 **CONTACT:** Lauren Creiman, (909) 833-9853

Bonita Unified Culinary Students Serve for a Cause at the Grateful Table Fundraiser

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – More than a dozen ProStart culinary students from Bonita and San Dimas high schools received an opportunity to network with restaurant owners, executive chefs, pastry chefs, and other industry professionals when they volunteered to serve at the California Restaurant Foundation's (CRF) annual Grateful Table fundraiser gala, held this fall at the Del Mar Racetrack.

Supporting Restaurant Cares, a CRF relief fund that provides a safety net for food and beverage workers facing unexpected hardship, this year the Grateful Table raised $228,000. Bonita and San Dimas ProStart students were invited to help staff the event for the second consecutive year, representing two of the three Southern California ProStart high school programs invited to participate this year.

"The Grateful Table is an amazing educational experience," Bonita High School senior Abby Brandler said. "We experience food that we've never tried, and are introduced to new flavor profiles and new ways of using ingredients that will inspire us to create original dishes of our own. It's also one of the best places to network. Everyone is so nice. Culinary is a big tent, but it is also a tight knit industry, so it's good to know as many people as you can."

BUSD students worked with a number of top chefs in the San Diego area, including the executive chefs at Legends Global at Del Mar Fairgrounds, Vintana Wine + Dine in Escondido, George's at the Cove in La Jolla, and Cowboy Star Restaurant in San Diego, as well as the pastry chef from Barona's Casino.

BUSD culinary students working in the kitchen helped to prep, plate, and serve appetizers and a gourmet five-course meal to a sizable gathering of culinary industry VIPs, supporters, and community members, while others welcomed guests and assisted VIP speakers.

Bonita High junior Tatum Valdovinos worked the front of the house, which included escorting one of the Grateful Table guest speakers, a cancer survivor whose career was revived through the generosity of Restaurant Cares. Valdovinos, who is considering attending the Collins College of Hospitality Management at Cal Poly Pomona, said he is thankful for the opportunity to network with industry professionals.

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"I love learning everyone's backstory. It's fun to hear how everyone found their way into restaurants and hospitality," Valdovinos said. "An event like the Grateful Table is a great chance to put all your training and skills to the test, especially your management and communication skills. I feel like working at the Grateful Table will help me handle stressful situations."

Bonita High senior Leslie Hernandez worked in the kitchen alongside George's at the Cove executive chef Masa Kojima, helping prep and assemble a wild mushroom and black truffle lasagna.

"Working at the Grateful Table is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. We are learning from the top chefs in California, and it takes our culinary knowledge to a whole new level," Hernandez said. "I definitely want to continue in culinary and narrow my options through all the different trainings I have received."

The exclusive training provided by CRF's ProStart program also includes a day of learning soft skills such as resume building and honing interview skills during its Force in Training (FIT) Day, which was held on Oct. 27. BUSD culinary students spent the day preparing for their first job and paycheck by conducting mock interviews, discussing their career paths and financial literacy. Bonita High welcomed alumnus and former ProStart student Ryder Ortiz, who now oversees five restaurants, as a presenter.

"We are extremely grateful to the CRF for once again inviting our students to participate in the Grateful Table, as well as providing assistance in so many crucial areas as our kids learn what it takes to have a career in hospitality," Bonita High ProStart instructor Laurie Brandler said.

PHOTOS:

BUSD_2026_GRATEFULTABLE1: Members of Bonita Unified's ProStart culinary program help assemble and plate a gourmet entrée at the California Restaurant Foundation's (CRF) annual Grateful Table fundraiser gala, held this fall at the Del Mar Racetrack.

BUSD_2026_GRATEFULTABLE2: Bonita Unified's ProStart Culinary program, which includes both San Dimas and Bonita high school students, are all smiles after rubbing elbows with restaurant owners and executive chefs at the Grateful Table fundraiser, held this fall.

BUSD_2026_GRATEFULTABLE3: San Dimas High School junior Ella Carranza puts the finishing touches on a gourmet dessert at the Grateful Table fundraiser, held this fall at the Del Mar Racetrack. This is the second year in a row that the Bonita Unified ProStart culinary program has volunteered to assist at the California Restaurant Foundation fundraiser.

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