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## **Foodlink Career Fellowship’s inaugural class ‘moves up’**

*Career Empowerment Program prepares people for middle-skills jobs in food industry*

ROCHESTER – Each day, the Foodlink Community Kitchen prepares healthy meals for thousands of children, and a healthy future for a small group of adults thanks to an innovative program launched this summer.

The Foodlink Career Fellowship is a new culinary training program that aims to become a pathway to prosperity for individuals who have faced barriers to sustainable employment. The pilot class, which began their yearlong journey toward a career in the food industry in July, celebrated the completion of the first quarter with a “Moving Up” ceremony at Foodlink on Oct. 5. The participants – or Fellows, as they are called – will continue on with the curriculum that includes both classroom and hands-on training within Foodlink’s state-of-the-art commercial kitchen.

“We designed the Foodlink Career Fellowship to empower people with the training and skills required to graduate into a living-wage job,” said Foodlink President & CEO Julia Tedesco. “We’re so pleased with the progress already made by the Fellows in this inaugural class, and we see promising futures for each of them in the regional food industry.”

Foodlink spent more than two years developing the program in collaboration with a wide variety of stakeholders. Employers such as Wegmans Food Markets, Palmer Food Service, LiDestri Foods, Barilla, Monroe Community College, and University of Rochester all helped shape a curriculum designed to prepare individuals for middle-skills jobs that require an ample amount of training. The William G. McGowan Charitable Fund, William and Sheila Konar

Foundation, and ESL Charitable Foundation provided crucial funding that allowed Foodlink to launch the first cohort of participants on July 9.

Foodlink hired two full-time staff members to oversee the program. Jes Scannell joined Foodlink in 2017 as the Director of Career Empowerment Initiatives, and Clayton Waller joined Foodlink in 2018 as a Career Coach. The Fellows work side-by-side daily with Foodlink's kitchen staff, led by Executive Chef Casey Holenbeck.

"This first class of Fellows is special," Scannell said. "We look forward to the next nine months as they invest in themselves, gain valuable experience, and take a giant step closer to self-sustainability."

Eight members of the class celebrated "Moving Up" in the ceremony held Oct. 5, when they officially transitioned from program participants, to Foodlink employees. They each prepared a dish – some working individually, others in teams – for a tasting event in which program supporters and community partners were invited. The menu included: Exploding Eggplant, Lil Spice Empanadas, Cajun Salmon Bites, Southern-style meatloaf and Latinas Mofongo Bites. Fellows were given a new knife set, and received their first paycheck as official Foodlink employees.

"I learned so much, from how to make eggs the right way to how to properly brine chicken and other meats," said Anthony Arroyo, a recent graduate of East High's culinary program. "Some of my goals at Foodlink are to finish the program strong and be able to move on from small-time jobs to big things, like being a chef at a Wegmans restaurant or another nice kitchen."

Fellows have spent time preparing healthy meals for Rochester children attending after-school programs, and assisting in the kitchen's Value-Added Processing Center, where Foodlink continues to expand its apple-slicing operations. Each afternoon, they spend time in Foodlink's new classroom learning culinary skills via Rouxbe, a world-renowned online culinary training program.

"I am so grateful for the experience I have had here at Foodlink, and for the opportunity to become an employee," said Gloria Soldevila Ramos, who moved to Rochester from Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria devastated the island in 2017. "This is important because it will help me achieve the goal that I want in the future, and that is to become a sous chef."

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## **About Foodlink**

Foodlink is a community food resource center and the Feeding America food bank serving Allegany, Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates counties. For 40 years, we have leveraged the power of food to transform lives, end hunger and build healthier

communities. Through good stewardship, innovation and collaboration, Foodlink mobilizes a diverse network of partners and stakeholders to eradicate both the symptoms and root causes of hunger.

Our suite of food access programs provides new access points to nutritious and affordable food in underserved communities. Our team of nutrition educators empowers people at risk of diet-related illness with the skills and knowledge to make healthy choices. Our food banking operations distribute millions of pounds of food to a network of hundreds of human service agencies throughout our service area. The Foodlink Community Kitchen prepares and delivers thousands of meals daily for Rochester children, supports our regional agricultural economy by slicing locally grown apples, and hosts a one-of-a-kind career empowerment program to train individuals with barriers to employment for careers in the regional food industry. Learn more about how we are creating healthy futures for every community we serve at [www.foodlinkny.org](http://www.foodlinkny.org), or follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram at @foodlinkny.

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