

Culinary Stars of Tomorrow Compete in The Education Fund's Top Chef Battle *Miami's top culinary stars and influencers to judge student competition*

MIAMI (Feb. 18, 2020) – Aspiring chefs in Miami-Dade County senior high schools and middle schools will go head-to-head in **The Education Fund Taste of Education presented by Sapoznik Insurance**, a culinary competition judged by South Florida's top chefs and 500+ influencers on Tuesday, March 10, at Jungle Island.

The Education Fund Taste of Education presented by Sapoznik Insurance (**#tasteofeducation**) is a food, wine, and craft beer festival that will showcase the gastronomic talents of students from 24 culinary programs in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Thirty culinary teams will prepare gourmet bites in hopes of scoring \$20,000 in grants and prizes.

The judges – top local chefs, hospitality executives, and culinary influencers – will determine the winning teams. This year's culinary panel includes event chair **Chef Ralph Pagano, Naked Taco; Chef Dayanny De La Cruz, Hard Rock Stadium and Super Bowl LIV; Chef Paula DaSilva, The Ritz-Carlton; Chef André Bienvenu, Joe's Stone Crab; Chef Letty Alvarez, LA Sweetz; Chef Allen Susser, author of *Green Fig and Lionfish*; and Chef Julie Frans, The Doral yard**, among others.

Prize categories include best meat, seafood, vegetable, dessert, visual appearance, and sales pitch. "Guests won't even taste it, if you don't sell it," said Naked Taco Chef Ralph Pagano.

Students will see if their sales pitches are up to the task, serving their creations to more than 500 guests, including executives from **Sapoznik Insurance, Wells Fargo, Assurant, TD Bank, Colonial Life, Florida Blue, GMCVB, All Florida Paper, MetLife** and many others, who will select the winner of the **People's Choice Award**.

"The Education Fund Taste of Education presented by Sapoznik Insurance gives high school culinary students a taste of the real world and a chance to meet leaders in the hospitality industry, one of the leading industries powering our economy," said Linda Lecht, president of The Education Fund (EducationFund.org). "Hands-on experience and industry connections are critical for students' future careers."

This event also celebrates the 225 volunteers in **The Education Fund Teach-A-Thon presented by Wells Fargo**, a campaign that fosters awareness of the teaching profession and teaching quality, while raising money for educators and their students. This year's volunteers - Teacher Champions - featured 100 Wells Fargo employees, CEOs, community leaders, and business professionals who "stepped into the shoes" of local educators.

"I believe that culinary education is an incredibly important part of taking control of one's health and wellness," said Sapoznik Insurance Founder and CEO Rachel Sapoznik. "Sapoznik Insurance is honored to sponsor this impactful educational event that supports local culinary programs and aspiring chefs of tomorrow."

The Education Fund Teach-A-Thon, also sponsored by Sapoznik Insurance, Assurant Foundation, and South Florida Business Journal, kicked off last October and ends this month. The campaign has raised more than \$1 million for local schools since its launch 11 years ago.

Special thanks to **The Education Fund Taste of Education presented by Sapoznik Insurance and all their sponsors:** Wells Fargo, Assurant Foundation, TD Bank, Jungle Island, Pinnacle Housing Group, M-DCPS Career & Technical Education, Colonial Life, Carnival Foundation, Florida Blue, Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau, MetLife, South Florida Business Journal, All Florida Paper, Cy's Linen Services, Ocean Bank, Coastal Pacific Wine & Spirits of America, Biscayne Bay Brewing Company, Naked Taco, Café La Llave, Nestle Waters of South America, Kaufman Rossin & Co., Humana Foundation, Regions Bank, and Florida Power & Light.

Tickets are \$125 per person. Purchase tickets at EducationFund.org. Sponsorships are available.

Culinary Panel of Judges:

- Ralph Pagano, Naked Taco (Event Chair)
- Allen Susser, Chef Allen Consulting
- Melanie Dickinson, South Florida Business Journal
- Dayanny De La Cruz, Centerplate and Hard Rock Stadium
- Mark Borowski, Jungle Island
- Paulette Bilsky-Phillips, ElectriChef
- Andre Bienvenu, Joe's Stone Crab
- Paula DaSilva, The Ritz-Carlton
- Max Santiago, Executive Pastry Chef
- Bernie Matz, Menin Hospitality
- Letty Alvarez, LA Sweetz
- Gretchen Schmidt, Edible South Florida
- Linda Gassenheimer, Miami Herald and WDNA FM
- Jenny Elfving, Private Chef
- Jim M. Flader, Johnson & Wales University
- Julie Frans, The Doral Yard
- Daniel Gerget, The Standard Hotel
- April Pizzo, Caterer
- Patty Ruiz, The Mad Table
- Monty Trainer, Monty's

Participating Schools (Teams per School)

- American Senior High School
- Jorge Mas Canosa Middle School
- North Miami Beach Senior High School (2)
- Ronald Reagan Doral Senior High School
- South Miami Senior High School
- North Miami Senior High School (2)
- Robert Morgan Educational Center
- Lindsey Hopkins Technical College
- Miami Central Senior High School
- West Miami Middle School
- Dr. Michael M. Krop Senior High School
- Miami Springs Senior High School
- Miami Killian Senior High School
- Homestead Senior High School
- Lake Stevens Middle School
- Miami Lakes Educational Center
- South Dade Senior High School
- Somerset Academy South Homestead
- Miami Beach Senior High School
- Miami Sunset Senior High School
- Miami Northwestern Senior High School (2)

- Miami Jackson Senior High School (2)
- Miami Beach Nautilus Middle School
- Redland Middle School

Social Media Hashtag: #tasteofeducation

Facebook: @educationfundmiami

Instagram: @educationfundmiami

Twitter: #educationfund

LinkedIn: @the-education-fund-miami

###

About The Education Fund

The Education Fund brings innovative methods to local public schools, informs the community about public education and encourages private sector investment in public education. The organization improved student outcomes, including improving science scores by 84 percent, eating habits by 52 percent, and college enrollment by 34 percent. The Education Fund has won numerous awards, including the Greater Miami Chamber's NOVO Award for Non-Profit Excellence and the Blue Foundation's Sapphire Award. Visit EducationFund.org.