



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

Published by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) • College of Education • The University of Texas at Austin

## CONNECTING INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS TO FUNDRAISING

Community college development activities can be creative, exciting, and even *delicious*, as demonstrated by our annual *Taste the Future* event, which boasts of 1,000 attendees and more than 150 volunteers. The event, which has gained distinction as a culinary extravaganza in the community-at-large and within the profession, has seen significant growth since its inception over 10 years ago. It is modeled after some of the large culinary sampling events held in cities across the nation.

It is the brainchild of a College Development Foundation Board member who attended *Taste of Chicago* in 1988. Image building, "friendraising," and philanthropy all come together at this exciting social event. *Taste the Future* organizers consistently exceed their fund-raising goals and are able to establish stronger relationships with corporate sponsors each year. Last year, organizers raised over \$350,000 from corporate sponsorships and individual ticket sales—funds that are used to assist students in the form of scholarships or through special projects directly. Area chefs, food purveyors, and restaurant owners donate all food, supplies, and labor for this annual autumn evening event.

The development activities connected to this major event require yearlong planning and ongoing coordination with a host of campus constituents: the college's hospitality management faculty, corporations, special event consultants, and campus volunteers. More than 150 chefs and chef apprentices, from 60 restaurants, private clubs, and hotels, participate in the event. All are members of the American Culinary Federation, and many are graduates of the college's Chef Apprenticeship Program. Many of the chefs who donate numerous hours of labor have indicated that *Taste the Future* provides them an opportunity to "give back" to their alma mater and their profession.

Culinary stations are set up on the periphery of the college's center courtyard and in designated buildings. They are separated to provide easy access and flow but

are close enough to encourage mingling and conversation. Chefs decorate their stations with starched linens, floral arrangements, and culinary masterpieces carved from ice, fruits, and vegetables. Each station features one or more gourmet appetizers, entrees, or desserts prepared from the finest and freshest ingredients. Chefs, suited in their professional attire, greet and serve the guests with plentiful portions. Generally, there are no lines in which to wait and no tickets to present, as all guests are given event passes for the evening. College volunteers service beverage stations that provide wine, beer, and nonalcoholic beverages at various locations. Live music, instrumental and vocal, emanates from the center of campus and helps create an appropriate atmosphere for the attendees who are dressed in business attire for an "elegant night out." The evening always opens with a brief address by the college president, acknowledging the numerous corporate and individual sponsors.

### Establishing an Honorary Chair

Each year an honorary chair, usually selected from among companies which support the college, brings a high level of visibility to the event, creates camaraderie among other business and civic leaders, and enhances the level of support from other organizations. The honorary chair's name and company appear on all promotional and event materials. As this is a community event involving many different constituents, gaining leadership outside the college is critical.

### Cultivating Corporate Sponsorship

Corporate donations provide the foundation for the event—they "own the event." The sponsorships range from large corporate gifts of restricted and unrestricted funds, to donations of food and supplies, to guest gifts which are given to every ticket holder.

### Recruiting Campus Volunteers

Faculty, staff, student, and administrators are keys to the success of the event. This team of volunteers greets guests, tends bar, clears tables, distributes guest gifts,



and pitches in for all tasks before, during, and after the event. A separate party is planned after the official close of the event in appreciation of the work of volunteers and chefs.

### **Maintaining Relationships**

The spirit of cooperation and commitment from the chefs is vital. Many of the chefs, who are already overburdened with requests for charitable donations of time and talent, have remarked that *Taste the Future* is "the last event they will give up." Carefully planned for a Tuesday night when area restaurants experience slower volume, *Taste the Future* is a great opportunity for chef alumni and professionals to connect. The local president of the American Culinary Federation encourages participation and support. The college development office stays in touch with the chefs throughout the year by visiting the restaurants and mailing personalized pictures and brochures.

### **Encouraging Media Participation**

Local newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations are great supporters and promoters of this culinary extravaganza. The local food critic's participation and reviews have always bolstered the event with advance publicity and follow-up reviews. Recently, a feature article, "Taste the Philanthropy," appeared in the local newspaper, with color photos and a strong narrative.

### **Involving a Special Events Coordinator**

The most experienced of development officers cannot recreate an event of this magnitude without the assistance of a special events coordinator who brings creativity, fresh ideas, and professional expertise to any event. The growth and popularity of *Taste the Future* are attributed to the expert knowledge provided by professional special events personnel. Each year brings a new theme and a new twist to the event. A new array of culinary delights, a slightly different setup, carefully designed staging and lighting, entertainment, champagne toast upon arrival, and a unique gift upon departure dazzle attendees.

### **Establishing a Tradition**

*Taste the Future* is a labor-intensive, planning-intensive fund-raiser that requires careful coordination between campus constituents and numerous off-campus entities, including public safety and health officials, early on. Cultivating relationships and expressing appreciation help sustain the spirit of volunteerism and participation. The college president and the vice presi-

dent for development host individual donor luncheons throughout the year as expressions of gratitude.

*Taste the Future* provides the college with a prime opportunity to raise funds and friends, and to bring community members, corporate leaders, and alumni to campus. Bringing constituents to campus is an opportunity to acquaint or reacquaint attendees with the mission, vision, and goals of the college. It reaffirms the role of the college in the community and allows everyone to interact. Opportunities for future fund-raising can be cultivated through follow-up with ticket purchasers, corporate partnerships, and others.

Other colleges can implement similar events with their culinary arts, and other instructional programs such as fashion design, interior design, literature, technology, and the visual and performing arts can create unique fund-raising events, too.

*Taste the Future* can provide colleges with a vehicle for improved community relations, a showcase of academic and technical programs, and an occasion to support student success through substantial fund-raising.

**Brian Chapman**, *Enrollment Advisor, Columbus State Community College*

For additional information about *Taste the Future*, contact Peggy Calestro, Vice President for Development, Columbus State Community College, 550 East Spring Street Columbus, OH 43215. e-mail: pcalestr@csc.edu

*Suane D. Roueche, Editor*

*October 19, 2001, Vol. XXIII, No. 23*

©The University of Texas at Austin, 2001

Further duplication is permitted by MEMBER institutions for their own personal use.

*Innovation Abstracts* (ISSN 0199-106X) is published weekly following the fall and spring terms of the academic calendar, except Thanksgiving week, by the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD), Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, SZB 348, Austin, Texas 78712-1293, (512) 471-7545. Periodicals Postage Paid at Austin, Texas. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Innovation Abstracts*, The University of Texas at Austin, SZB 348, Austin, TX 78712-1293. Email: sroueche@mail.utexas.edu