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Educators Named "Chefs of Tomorrow"

Olson Communications, a full-service agency that specializes in delivering innovative marketing-communication strategy to its portfolio of select food-industry clients, announced the winning recipients of its fourth-annual Chefs of Tomorrow grant program for culinary educators.

Dana Cox, a chef instructor at the Kendall College School of Culinary Arts, was selected among greater Chicago post-secondary culinary educators to receive a \$1,500 grant from Olson Communications' Chefs of Tomorrow initiative based on juried review of her application and essay.

Cox will use the grant to visit heirloom-grain farms in Illinois and South Carolina as research for a book she's writing on her 12-month experiment of eating only foods grown on family farms. She is currently eight months into her endeavor.

"The goal of the project is, first, to prove that it is possible and, second, to inspire others to make whatever incremental change they can toward supporting local farming," says Cox, a 2005 culinary graduate of Kendall College who earned her bachelor's degree from Dominican University.

Cox also operates a successful personal-chef business, Old Stove LLC. "This knowledge will be shared with my students and the general public via my blog, the book, and every day in my classroom as we discuss sourcing, purchasing, and marketing foodstuffs."

Tai Sellers, a culinary-arts instructor at George Washington High School, was honored in the high-school division of the grant program. Sellers will apply her \$1,500 grant toward a week-long culinary immersion in Italy this summer, where she'll visit food producers and markets and attend cooking classes and scheduled tastings in Rome, Naples, and Sorrento.

"I plan to journal, take photos, and film my experiences, not only to influence my lesson plans, but also to share Italian cooking techniques with my students," says Sellers, a graduate of Johnson & Wales University's College of Culinary Arts in Providence, Rhode Island

Sellers' career includes cooking stints at New York City's The Spotted Pig (credited as the first gastropub in the U.S.), Chicago's Green Zebra and China Grill restaurants, and the Novotel London West in the U.K.

"Many of my students have never traveled beyond the north side of Chicago from the southeast side. They deserve to see a global view of food, even if only through my eyes and experiences for now."

Chefs of Tomorrow grant recipients include chef instructors Laurette Stefani (2010) of Robert Morris University and Laura Vaughn (2009) and Lee Jamison (2008), both of Washburne Culinary Institute. Olson Communications will announce the 2012 Chefs of Tomorrow grant program next winter.

To celebrate the company's 20th Anniversary, Olson Communications has committed to offering up to \$20,000 in new grants to the greater Chicago area's high-school and college-level culinary educators through the company's Chefs of Tomorrow program. In all cases, the professional-development award must ultimately benefit student learning. Additional grants will be made to Chicago community-based programs that endeavor to improve education on food and nutrition.