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Contact: Risa B. Hoag for Harquin Creative, [risabh@gmail.com](mailto:risabh@gmail.com), 914-996-8100

## **12 Students Graduate from Specialized Culinary Training Program**

### **Creative Collaboration Helps Local Employer Fast-Track Training and Hiring of Job Seekers**

**(WESTCHESTER/December 19, 2018)** – The Westchester-Putnam Career Center Network, led by Thom Kleiner, and the Office of Economic Development, under the direction of Bridget Gibbons, are partnering with higher education and County businesses to develop ways to fast-track training for individuals looking for employment. This creative new collaborative effort is not only helping businesses hire trained employees, but also underscores the reality that a college degree is not the only path to employment.

Recently Juana Wilson and John Walsh of FLIK Hospitality Group turned to Westchester’s Office of Economic Development for help identifying candidates to fill open positions for cooks, line servers, and front desk personnel. Director, Bridget Gibbons, reached out to the Career Center and together they found a solution to not only fill the open positions at FLIK but to provide training for the appropriate candidates, so they were ready to go on day one.

The team joined forces with Westchester Community College to develop a culinary training program that provided select Career Center clients with the skills they needed to fill the open positions at FLIK. The College hosted the 10-day session in their campus facilities and classes were led by Desi Colon, the School’s acting chair of the Food Service Administration department. The program also included a full day of READI, a soft-skills job training program, conducted by LaTasha Hamlett-Carver, Program Specialist for the Career Center.

All 12 participants have graduated and are now on their way to new careers at FLIK, the Rye Brook-based provider of Hospitality services to GE, IBM, and other Westchester companies. FLIK is the leader within the Compass Group, the world’s 6th largest employer in food and support services management, for innovative cutting-edge culinary services as well. The Students are **Marilyn Gonzalez**, **Jennifer Guillen**, **Kison A. Utsey** and **Malcolm Myers** of Yonkers. **Amoya D. Hearne**, **Jamaal Holmes**, **Nassir R. Sturup**, **Keith J. Taylor** and **Lamont W. Albert Sr.** are from Mount Vernon. **Khaleel A. Johns-Watts** is from White Plains, **Yuko Kidd** is from West Harrison, and **Ellane Rocha Winter** is a resident of Mamaroneck.

“This new effort is a win/win. Business owners can turn to us to identify candidates, develop a training program geared to their requirements, and then get people on the job all within a matter of a few weeks,” stated Kleiner. “The program was provided at no charge to the job seekers. It is a collaborative effort that will benefit the businesses, the individuals, and ultimately the economic vitality of the County,” he added.

“We know we need to be proactive and responsive at the County level. When we were approached by FLIK, we were able to organize a two-week rapid response training program. Thanks to our partnership with Westchester Community College, we were able to bring people in, get them interviewed, trained and on the job. We are looking forward to additional collaborative efforts to do more of that for employers in the County,” stated Gibbons.

Other businesses are encouraged to contact Linda McKinzie-Daugherty at (914) 813-7334 or via email at [lqmj@westchestergov.com](mailto:lqmj@westchestergov.com) to find out how they can work with the Office of Economic Development or the Career Center to identify potential employees, host a job fair or develop a training program to help with their hiring needs.

**THE WESTCHESTER-PUTNAM WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD (WPWDB)** is comprised of leaders and staff of state and county government agencies, non-profits, public education, and the private sector who work together to strengthen the partnerships between business, education, and service providers within the “Career Center Network” to meet the needs for a skilled workforce. The WPWDB pursues funding opportunities and develops model programs and leading-edge practices. The “Network” is made up of four Career Centers (White Plains, Mount Vernon, Peekskill, and Carmel) as well as partner agencies that provide state-of-the-art technology, training, resources, and services to youth, adults and employers. For more information, visit [www.westchesterputnamonestop.com](http://www.westchesterputnamonestop.com).

**WESTCHESTER COUNTY OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT** works to improve the County’s economic well-being and quality of life. This includes a broad range of activities to attract, create and retain jobs, and to foster a resilient, pro-growth and inclusive economy. Westchester is led by County Executive George Latimer, who took office in January 2018 as the ninth County Executive. Learn more about Westchester County by visiting [www.westchestergov.com](http://www.westchestergov.com)

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From left: Evelyn Snow, IBM Learning Center; Jeanne Maloney, WCC; Gary Divney, Flik; Juana Wilson, Flik; Jim Irvine, WCC; David Baker, Flik; Thom Kleiner, Westchester-Putnam Workforce Development Board; Bridget Gibbons, Westchester County Office of Economic Development; John Walsh, Flik; Desi Colon, WCC; and students Eliane Rocha Winter, Jamaal Holmes, Yuko Kidd, Marilyn Gonzalez, Nasir R. Stirrup, Malcolm Myers, Amoya D. Hearne, Jennifer Guillen, Khaleel A. John-Watts and Kison A. Utsey.