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For Immediate Release

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Oak Park sixth graders get in on farm-to-fork, food truck craze

Oak Ridge Elementary's 'Five Star Restaurant' to include mobile dining, stellar sit-down menu under direction of Chef Mulvaney

April 4, 2013 (Sacramento) – A trendy mobile restaurant trailer will be pulling into Oak Park next week to serve up tasty gourmet tacos for a VIP crowd of local movers and shakers.

But you won't find a hipster foodie working the window. This truck – and the fancy restaurant it will pull up next to – will be run entirely by elementary school students.

On Monday (April 8), a group of dedicated sixth graders will transform the cafeteria of Oak Ridge Elementary School in Oak Park into a "Five Star Restaurant," an elegant evening conceived, designed and executed by the students themselves – with the help of midtown celebrity chef Patrick Mulvaney of Mulvaney's B&L Restaurant.

Riding the popularity of food trucks, the evening will begin with appetizer tacos served from the window of a teardrop trailer, a new twist created to give the students more opportunities to taste the joys and challenges of running a business.

"The trailer provides a great new experience for the kids that's one step beyond the restaurant," says Stella Ruiz, of Miracles and Milestones, the group that has organized the restaurant program for 48 students for the sixth year.

"With the trailer, the kids actually handle the money and calculate the change. And there's a lot of pressure to get the tacos out fast, which is a new wrinkle."

Ruiz purchased the trailer as a business for her son, Tommy Ruiz, 25, who has Down syndrome. Kids from the Five Star Restaurant program have participated in catering events with Tommy Ruiz, where they have learned valuable lessons about customer service. Later this month, the kids will man the trailer at the 15th anniversary celebration for the UC Davis MIND Institute, Ruiz said.

The trailer experience compliments the work the students do in the restaurant program. From the first day of the program to Monday's culmination, the kids are treated like partners in a real business, says Ruiz. Students interview for their jobs on the sales, public relations, interior design and finance teams. They hold business meetings after school and on Saturdays. They make personal sales calls to sell tickets at the Capitol, City Hall and other locations around Sacramento.

Throughout the 10-week program, students learn the ins and outs of the restaurant business from Mulvaney, including how to plan, cook and serve gourmet meals. They also accompany him on a shopping trip to a local farmer's market where they purchase the ingredients for the dinner.

"The kids are so excited to be involved that some show up at 7:30 a.m. for the 9 a.m. program on Saturdays," Ruiz says.

In the future, Ruiz hopes to take the program to another level. Someday, she'd like the students to grow the food they serve through creation of a cooperative farm. Ruiz is now studying the farm business at the Center for Land-Based Learning in Winters.

So what's on the menu for Monday?

Oak Ridge Principal Doug Huscher says that's a closely guarded secret. "We'll find out that night when the students announce the menu," he said.

The best part of the experience is that the students themselves get to decide which field trips to take with the estimated \$3,000 to \$4,000 profit the restaurant will reap. They almost always choose a camping and hiking trip over Disneyland.

WHAT: Oak Ridge Elementary School's "Five Star Restaurant"
WHEN: 5:30 p.m. on Monday, April 8
WHERE: Oak Ridge Elementary School
4501 Martin Luther King Blvd.
Sacramento, CA 95820

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