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Getting the word out about a sweet career

The Confectionery Foundation expands outreach program at Sweets & Snacks Expo

By [Amanda Gajdosik](#)

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Only in the second year of a pilot educational outreach program, The Confectionery Foundation has made impressive strides in getting more culinary arts students interested in careers within the industry. After last year's success, the foundation has expanded its program to include more participation of schools, students, faculty and administrators.

More than 70 chefs-in-training and food marketing students will attend the *Sweets & Snacks Expo* May 21 – 23 at McCormick Place, Chicago, to learn about career paths in the global confectionery industry. Attendees will focus on presentations from mid- and large-sized manufacturers and suppliers.

"This program is about opening these young food professionals' minds to the great innovation and many wonderful possibilities our confectionery industry offers," says Sara Clair, chairman of The Confectionery Foundation. "We have one of the most inventive and creative industries. It's wonderful to share what we do and invite the next generation to join us."



Students and faculty attend last year's Sweets and Snack's Expo.

Schools participating in the program include the following: The Illinois Institute of Art; The French Pastry School; Triton College; Curie Metropolitan High School; Simeon Career Academy; St. Joseph's University; St. Louis Community College Forest Park; and Western Michigan University Food Marketing Program. Each school will bring their top students for tours, samples and information sessions at the show.

Mentor guides will lead the students, many wearing chefs' whites, to booths for 8-minute presentations. Each group will visit five booths from the list of 17 host companies. Mentors include Niel Campbell, Seattle Chocolates; Kathy Corcoran, Burdette Beckman; Mary Beth Geraci, Carlin O'Brien; Lee Hartman, Printpack, Inc.; Bill Kelley, The Jelly Belly Candy Co.; Rob Nelson, Elmer Chocolates; Linda Sahagian, Sahagian & Associates; Jean Thompson, Seattle Chocolate Co.; and Darren Brewer, The Blommer Chocolate Co.

Brewer, who was involved in speaking with students at last year's Expo, will be welcoming students to the Blommer Chocolate booth as well as serving as a mentor guide.

"The experience of speaking directly with these students was wonderful," says Brewer, regional sales manager for Blommer Chocolate. "The students were impressed with the great work being accomplished by our industry in assisting origin farmers, their families and communities."

In addition to hearing from manufacturing professionals, students will be exposed to careers involving journalism, graphic design and marketing. They will learn about environmentally conscious cocoa farming, taste fresh cacao, and hear a presentation on the many health benefits of cocoa from David Stuart Ph.D., founder of Food & Nutrient Impact, LLC.

"The presentation was a smart balance of lecture, demonstration and personal experience," says Franco Pacini, director of The French Pastry School based in Chicago. "The students often have difficulty picturing the variety of options that are available to them within the various food industries. For the students to see the jobs detailed in the presentation and then for the students to talk to the people who hold those positions was great. "

Jeanne Kraus, pastry chef Instructor for the Illinois Institute of Art Culinary program, echoes Pacini's observations.

"The *Sweets & Snacks Expo* has opened our eyes to potential career opportunities in the field of pastry arts that we never realized existed," she says. "Our students are making truffles, moulded chocolates, and peanut brittle. They get to see an industry where they make and sell and market these products as a career."

Noting that her students typically consider employment in bakeries and restaurants, this career awareness program "...opens up an exciting future of possibilities for our graduates not only in the confectionery field but in snack foods as well," Krause adds.

Aside from the educational outreach, The Confectionery Foundation is working to increase interest among students attending vocational schools and even middle schools located near NCA members' factories across the country.

"When the NCA called together a task force in November of 2011, it took us a very short period of time to realize that it didn't matter whether the company was on the East or West Coast, large or small; many of our companies had available jobs and were having difficulty finding a skilled workforce to hire," Clair explains.

Developing a pilot program based on the *Sweets & Snacks Expo* helps both the students and presenters alike, she explains. It showcases the opportunities the industry has to offer newcomers who are building careers with a base of knowledge and skills that can prove indispensable.

Clair continues, "By reaching out to students who love food and want to produce food for Americans, we're inviting them to come and see the wealth of opportunity they can find in our confectionery industry, and in turn, build a stronger industry."

Persons looking to act as a mentor guide or host a group of students at their company's booth at the *Sweets & Snacks Expo* should contact Sara Clair at sclair@brown-haley.com.

Sweetening career paths

(Companies participating in this year's Confectionery Foundation tours at the *Sweets & Snacks Expo*; booth numbers in parentheses)

Annabelle Candy Company (1130)

aspecialtybox.com

Blommer Chocolate (210)

Brown & Haley (551)

Candy Industry Magazine (975)

Elmer Chocolate (1735)

Hawaiian Host (1175)

The Hershey Co. (1505)

Jel Sert Co. (615)

Jelly Belly (837)

Just Born (1803)

Kencraft Candy (1385)

Mars Chocolate North America (805)

Primrose Candy (2320)

Professional Image (592)

Sahagian & Associates (1230)

Sconza Candy Co. (313)

Sweet Candy Co. (310)

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