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Students Descend on JMU for Annual Virginia ProStart Competition

The annual high school competition saw Marshall Academy, of Fairfax County Public Schools, and New Horizons Regional Education Center, of Newport News Public Schools, take home first place finishes in the culinary and management competitions, respectively.

Harrisonburg, Va. – On Friday, March 15, the Virginia Restaurant Lodging & Travel Association Foundation (VRLTAF) welcomed dozens of students from around the state to Harrisonburg, Virginia for the 2024 Virginia ProStart Competition. This annual event is an opportunity for students to compete for scholarships and the privilege of representing the Commonwealth at the National ProStart Invitational later this year.

“This event is really about investing in our industry,” says Eric Terry, President of the Virginia Restaurant, Lodging, and Travel Association (VRLTA). “The students competing here today are the foodservice leaders of tomorrow. Their participation has shown that the future is bright, dedicated, and driven.”

The Virginia ProStart Invitational is composed of two distinct competitions that showcase the most important skills needed on both sides of the restaurant and foodservice industry: front-of-the-house (Management Competition) and behind-the-scenes in the kitchen (Culinary Competition). This year's event took place at James Madison University.

The Culinary Competition highlights the creative abilities of teams through the preparation of a three-course meal in just 60 minutes, using only two butane burners with no access to running water or electricity. There's no room for error as they're evaluated on taste, skill, teamwork, safety, and sanitation. Congratulations to the following schools on their respective finishes:

- First Place: Marshall Academy (Falls Church, VA)
- Second Place: New Horizons Regional Education Center (Newport News, VA)
- Third Place: Bridging Communities Regional Career & Technical Center (New Kent, VA)

The Management Competition asks teams to develop a proposal for the next hot restaurant concept and present it to industry judges. The team's ability to think on their feet is also tested as they quickly solve challenges managers face daily. Congratulations to the following schools on their respective finishes:

- First Place: New Horizons Regional Education Center I (Newport News, VA)
- Second Place: Arlington Career Center (Arlington, VA)
- Third Place: Kempsville High School II (Virginia Beach, VA)

“We saw unparalleled dedication and creativity in the teams who attended this year's event,” says Jai Girard, Director of Education and Workforce for VRLTA. “Their innovative approaches, coupled with an unyielding spirit of teamwork and leadership, underscored the bright future of the hospitality industry here in the Commonwealth. Congratulations to all the teams for setting new benchmarks and inspiring us with your passion and commitment.”

Marshall Academy and New Horizons Regional Education Center will now go on to compete in the National ProStart Invitational's culinary and management competitions, respectively. The event takes place April 26-28 at the Marriott Waterfront in Baltimore, MD.

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The [Virginia Restaurant Lodging and Travel Association](http://www.vrlta.org) is the unified voice of the restaurant, lodging, travel and hospitality suppliers associations. VRLTA creates value for members by promoting the legislative interests of the industry, networking, educational opportunities, and protecting free enterprise. For more information, visit www.vrlta.org or call 800-552-2225.

As the educational arm of the VRLTA, the [Virginia Restaurant, Lodging, and Travel Association Foundation](http://www.vrlta.org) exists to enhance the restaurant and hospitality industries through education and encouraging youth to pursue post-secondary education in the culinary and hospitality fields. This is primarily done through the coordination of the Virginia ProStart program and the administration of a scholarship program.