

The Hospitality Boom

Collin College's IHCE Prepares Students for the Growing Industry

by Kirk DICKEY

"Anyone can provide service, but what makes a guest come back to a place of business is the hospitality,"

Amy Slaughter

Attentive to details and invested in making your special day as amazing as it can be, Amy Slaughter is the kind of person you want helping plan your special event.

From wedding receptions and fundraising galas to milestone birthdays and anniversary parties, Slaughter has helped plan dozens of social catering events as an event sales manager for Courtyard by Marriott Dallas-Allen. Slaughter is the person people go to when they are trying to decide which linens to go with, whether there will be a bar, if there should be a DJ or a live band and the host of other questions they have when planning a memorable event.

Her specialty is long-term planning engagements, where she can see an event develop.

"There are lots of details," Slaughter said. "I like seeing a finished product. Since I usually take long-term projects, on the day of the event, I get to see it birthed in a way."

A graduate of Collin College's Institute of Hospitality and Culinary Education (IHCE), Slaughter has turned what she calls "a heart for service" into a full-time career in the booming hospitality industry.

She isn't the only one. Economic modeling predicts that careers in meeting, convention and event planning will grow by 13.8 percent between 2015 and 2018 for Collin, Denton and Rockwall counties. The growth in the planning sector and a wider array of hospitality jobs is due in part to the explosive growth of hotels and convention centers in the area.

According to Marla Roe, executive director of the Frisco Convention and Visitors Bureau, up to 39 hotel projects are being considered in Collin and Denton

counties in the next two years, as well as specialty projects, like Frisco's Ford Center at the Star.

The city of Allen alone has two hotels under construction and a third being planned, in addition to the 65,000-square-foot convention center planned for the Watters Creek area. The convention center's largest room will host up to 2,000 visitors at a time, according to Karen Cromwell, the director of the Allen Texas Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"When you go full service, you have to have a full banquet staff, you have to have a catering team, event coordinators, front desk help and everyone else that makes the convention center run," Cromwell said.

That translates to jobs, and a two-year education at Collin's IHCE can put students on track to make a starting salary of \$35,000-\$40,000 as an entry-level hospitality manager, according to IHCE Director Karen



Musa. Collin College currently offers a two-year associate degree in hospitality and foodservice management, and certificates in both

meetings and event management and hotel/restaurant management.

Musa said that students in the IHCE program are given a

comprehensive understanding of the workings of the hospitality industry and what it takes to truly add hospitality to the service sector.

"Anyone can provide service, but what makes a guest come back to a place of business is the hospitality," she said. "It is a very intangible piece of the business, so we are teaching them everything from guest cycles, to how to market a hospitality business, to how to handle human resource assets, to financial aspects of hospitality, and the food and beverage side of the industry."

With an understanding of all the moving parts associated with hospitality, graduates are able to better manage their part of the hospitality engine that drives the industry. Slaughter, for instance, said that she uses the skills she learned at Collin College every day.

"Every class was critical. As I put time into my position here, I see all of the things that I learned at Collin being played out in my line of work," Slaughter said.

The program's graduates aren't the only ones singing its praises, however. The IHCE recently received word it is being awarded accreditation from the Accreditation Commission for Programs in Hospitality Administration (ACPHA), one of the premier hospitality programs in the nation. Collin College joins only three other colleges in the state of Texas and just more than 60 nationwide who have earned the honor.

The college was already accredited by the American Culinary Federation (ACF), making it one of less than 15 schools globally to have both the ACF and ACPHA accreditations. The only other one in Texas that has both is St. Phillips in San Antonio.

Musa said the accreditation, which the school has been working on



since 2014, is a validation that Collin College's program is providing its students the highest in educational standards when compared to other

university and community college programs. More than the honor, though, Musa said that the accreditation process has helped the

program take a long look at itself and allowed it to improve itself.

"At the end of the day, after that self-analysis, you are going to have a better program for your students," Musa said.

As a former student, Slaughter said the IHCE program was responsive and effective even before the ACPHA accreditation. She said it was the right fit for her career aspirations.

"It's affordable and it's close to home. I just knew there were a lot of good resources here at Collin College," she said.

Learn more about the IHCE and the available hospitality and culinary programs at Collin College by visiting www.collin.edu/departments/ihce/index.html. ❖

Kirk Dickey is a public relations writer with Collin College.

Photos by Nick Young, Collin College photographer.