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It's Back to School Time for Aspiring Culinary Management Professionals

*Restaurant Association of Maryland Education Foundation ProStart® Program
Now in over 103 High Schools in 14 Maryland Counties*

(Columbia, Maryland) The Restaurant Association of Maryland Education Foundation announced today that the opening of the 2009-2010 school year has marked further expansion of the state's ProStart program, a national 'School-to-Career' high school curriculum which focuses on culinary and restaurant management.

"Just ten years ago the ProStart program started with fewer than ten schools. Now 3,500 Maryland students are participating in an advanced curriculum offered at 103 high schools in 14 different counties across the state," commented Marshall Weston, Vice President of the Restaurant Association of Maryland Education Foundation. ProStart educates students, parents, counselors and teachers about hospitality careers and closes the gap between the classroom and the workplace by creating quality work and learning experiences for both students and faculty.

Nationwide, the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation reports that over 78,000 students participate in more than 1,600 schools, across 47 states, territories and districts. The curriculum is recognized by the Maryland State Department of Education as an official Career and Technology Education (CTE) program. "Culinary arts and hospitality management are intense and highly skilled professions. Whether students are looking to enter the job market directly or making plans for college, ProStart will teach them the skills to help them get there," continued Weston.

Maryland restaurants generate over \$9 billion in sales and employ over 174,000 great employees in over 9,600 establishments. Industry employment is projected to grow over 14% by 2017. "The rapid growth of participation in the ProStart program is matched by the increasing career opportunities in foodservice and hospitality for its students. The industry offers highly skilled management-level positions and broad career paths," commented Paul Hartgen, President and CEO of the Restaurant Association of Maryland.

Students enrolled in the ProStart curriculum are also given the opportunity to compete for scholarships that can be applied towards continuing their education in the hospitality and management fields. In Maryland, ProStart students compete for those scholarship dollars in the Maryland ProStart Student Invitational. This preeminent high school competition highlights the culinary and management skills the students have mastered over the course of the two year program. Competition winners are then eligible to compete in the National ProStart Student Invitational where they are joined by fellow future leaders of the industry as well as current industry and academic leaders.

"Educational facilities offering the ProStart program are providing students with the opportunity to jumpstart their careers, make connections and build relationships. The learning experience is not only promising for its students but also for the future of our industry. We are working today to provide a more educated workforce for tomorrow," added Hartgen.

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ProStart is managed nationally by National Restaurant Association Solutions, a wholly owned subsidiary of the National Restaurant Association. For more information on the ProStart program and National ProStart Invitational, please visit www.prostart.restaurant.org.

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The Restaurant Association of Maryland (RAM) has remained relevant to restaurateurs for over 80 years by maintaining core principles born out of the first national financial crisis. In 1927 a small group of Baltimore area restaurateurs met to deal with some of the challenges facing the economy and the Foodservice Industry. Today, RAM is a 2,000 member strong statewide trade association operated for the purpose of promoting, protecting and improving the foodservice industry in the State of Maryland. Since the very beginning, the Association has been run by restaurateurs and suppliers working not only for the benefit of dues paying members, but also for the restaurant industry as a whole. For more information about the restaurant industry in Maryland please visit our website at www.marylandrestaurants.com.