



# Bonita Unified

## SCHOOL DISTRICT

### NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## Bonita Unified ProStart Training Puts Culinary Students on the Path to Success

**SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE** – San Dimas High School Class of 2016 graduate Kris Lara spent only one year in Bonita Unified’s ProStart culinary education program as a senior, but the training he received inspired him to pursue a career in the restaurant industry. After years of hard work, Lara is now living the dream as pastry sous chef at Californios, a two-star Michelin restaurant in San Francisco.

Lara is one of dozens of Bonita Unified students who have participated in Northern California ProStart Training, a whirlwind six-day field trip focusing on culinary and hospitality education, which provides students opportunities to network with chefs and restaurant managers. The training is exclusive to Bonita and San Dimas high school students, and coordinated by Laurie and Nick Brandler, who teach ProStart at Bonita and San Dimas high schools, respectively.

“With ProStart we provide an overview of the restaurant and hospitality industry and other sectors and teach the kids a mixture of front of the house and back of the house,” Laurie Brandler said. “We get into a little bit of hotel and lodging and event planning, and show them the opportunities that are out there. But we really focus on the culinary/restaurant management side.”

Every year, the Brandlers select three students from each school to join them on Northern California ProStart Training field trip. The participants are a mix of students who are industry-bound and those who are on the fence about pursuing a career in culinary arts. The Brandlers try to find the students who will be the most positively impacted by the training.

A typical day of ProStart Training sees the students immersed in the culinary process from dawn until dusk, meeting with executive chefs, taking tours of acclaimed restaurants and culinary schools, sampling cuisine from a variety of eateries, and participating in exclusive workshops that cover everything from baking sourdough bread and the art of sushi making to creating a fine dining experience with caviar, truffles and aged cheese.

“Networking is really important,” Nick Brandler said. “The great thing about this industry is that when we plan this trip and reach out to people, they are so happy to have us. We don’t have to convince them to do it. When we get there, they have everything ready for us. We toured Clif Winery this year and they gave us a whole spread. The director of hospitality and culinary John McConnell talked to us for two and a half hours. This is the best way for a student to learn the business.”

An added benefit to the trip is reuniting with former students who have found jobs in the industry and are more than happy to mentor the new students and show them the path to success. Their star pupil is Lara, who was part of the first ProStart Training field trip in 2016. Lara made the most of his experience, networking with every chef he met, exchanging contact information, and following up with phone calls when he returned home.

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Lara had been accepted into the prestigious Culinary Institute of America in New York but declined to attend. Instead, after graduating high school, Lara emailed one of the chefs he had networked with during the field trip. The chef's response was to ask Lara how quickly he could return to San Francisco. Lara immediately booked a plane ticket and has not looked back since.

After discovering a passion for creating pastries – his specialty is bon bons – Lara eventually joined the staff at Californios as pastry chef. This year, Lara came full circle as he joined with executive chef Val Cantu and mentored current ProStart students during a tour of Californios, which also included a three-hour workshop on “Fine Dining and the Guest Experience.”

“I’ve put some thought into starting my own restaurant,” Lara said. “I don’t know what I want to open. I know I want to do something on my own, whether it’s a bon bon shop or a restaurant. I am so thankful to have had the opportunity to be a part of ProStart Training as a student and now as a mentor.”

The ProStart Training field trip was developed by the Brandlers, who both came to teaching after long careers in the restaurant industry. ProStart is an industry-backed culinary arts and restaurant management program for high school students coordinated by the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation. Students who meet the competencies of the program receive a work-ready certificate and a \$5,000 scholarship to Cal Poly Pomona’s Collins College of Hospitality Management.

“The culinary program and curriculum Laurie and Nick Brandler have developed has enabled many students to find their passion in the industry,” Interim Superintendent Matt Wien said. “We are proud that Kris Lara and other distinguished Bonita Unified alumni are serving as mentors for the new students in the program, and look forward to seeing how our culinary program continues to grow and thrive.”

#### PHOTOS:

**BUSD\_PROSTART1:** San Dimas High School Class of 2016 graduate Kris Lara serves up a gourmet pastry to Bonita High seniors Kendra Warner and Ethan Brandler and San Dimas High senior Monica Pastor at Californios, a two-star Michelin restaurant in San Francisco, during the Bonita Unified Northern California ProStart Training field trip, held in early November. Now a pastry sous chef at Californios, the training course helped Lara begin his career in the culinary industry.

**BUSD\_PROSTART2:** Bonita Unified ProStart students gather at Californios, a two-star Michelin restaurant in San Francisco, as part of their Northern California ProStart Training field trip in early November. The training, provided by BUSD ProStart teachers Nick and Laurie Brandler, gives students a chance to network and find their passion for the industry. From left to right: San Dimas High teacher Nick Brandler (back), Bonita High senior Kendra Warner, sophomore Charli Padilla and senior Ethan Brandler, San Dimas High senior Wilson Chen, San Dimas alum Kris Lara, Bonita High teacher Laurie Brandler (middle); San Dimas High seniors Monica Pastor and Allison Carranceja.

**BUSD\_PROSTART3:** San Dimas High ProStart culinary students Allison Carranceja, Wilson Chen and Monica Pastor receive a cooking lesson at the Culinary Institute of America in St. Helena during the Northern California ProStart Training field trip, held in early November. The training helps to prepare Bonita Unified ProStart culinary students for careers in the industry.



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