

Incarcerated Culinary Arts Students Serve Up Excellence at Patrick L. O’Daniel Unit Renaming Dedication

Huntsville, Texas — Representatives from the Windham School District, alongside the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and the Texas Board of Criminal Justice (TBCJ), convened in Gatesville, Texas on Friday, May 3, 2024, for a momentous renaming dedication ceremony at the Patrick L. O’Daniel Unit, formerly known as the Mountain View Unit.

In December 2023, the TBCJ made a unanimous decision to rename the unit in honor of the distinguished service rendered by the former TBCJ Chairman, Patrick L. O’Daniel. Mr. O’Daniel, who served on the board from 2017 to 2023, was an unwavering supporter of Windham and its transformative programs. His legacy continues to inspire positive growth within education in corrections.

Following the dedication ceremony, guests were treated to a culinary experience crafted by women in Windham’s Culinary Arts class at the Crain campus. Guided by their teacher, Ms. Joyce Johnson, and other district Culinary Arts instructors, Ms. Martha Robinson and Mr. Dexter Spalding, these students meticulously planned and executed a Mexican-inspired menu, showcasing their proficiency in culinary arts. The menu featured an array of delectable dishes, including beef, chicken and cheese enchiladas, complemented by charro and refried beans, Spanish rice, all of the sides and fixings and traditional tres leches cake for dessert. At the former Chairman’s request, the students also prepared a side of devilled eggs. The students and instructors played a monumental role in the success of this event. From obtaining all supplies and ingredients, to preparing dishes and serving guests, this experience proved to be an excellent opportunity for the students to obtain realistic experience similar to what they will experience in the culinary industry upon reentry.

“Windham School District is immensely proud of these women for their display of talent and dedication at the Patrick L. O’Daniel Unit Dedication Ceremony,” Windham Superintendent Kristina J. Hartman said. “Their culinary expertise not only showcased their skill, but also honored the legacy of Mr. O’Daniel, whose unwavering support has significantly impacted our district and its students.”

The preparation and delivery of this elaborate meal underscored the comprehensive training provided by Windham’s Culinary Arts program, available to men and women at 18 campuses across the district. With the guidance of their culinary arts instructors, students applied their diverse skill set acquired through rigorous coursework covering food safety, advanced cooking techniques and more. This showcased their ability to cater to a variety of palates and preferences, ensuring a memorable dining experience for all attendees.

Windham is honored to have played a role in commemorating Mr. O’Daniel’s legacy, whose visionary leadership has left a mark on the district and its students. Through his support,

Windham has witnessed significant advancements, including improved access to libraries within correctional facilities, salary adjustments for educators and the implementation of technology-driven initiatives supporting classroom instruction and digital literacy.

As Windham School District reflects on Mr. O'Daniel's unwavering commitment to serving the state of Texas, it reaffirms its dedication to providing quality education and transformative opportunities to students within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

ABOUT WINDHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT

Windham School District (Windham) provides academic, career and technical education and life skills programs to eligible students within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). With 98 campuses located in prison facilities across Texas, Windham strives to equip students with the necessary education and skills to successfully reenter the workforce within their communities. For media or partnership inquiries, please contact Danielle Nicholes, Communications Administrator, at danielle.nicholes@wsdtx.org.