MIAMI-DADE COLLEGE’S TUYO RESTAURANT ANNOUNCES PURCHASING PARTNERSHIP WITH HOMESTEAD FARM STAFFED BY FORMERLY HOMELESS RESIDENTS

Executive Chef Norman Van Aken’s downtown Miami eatery looks to Verde Gardens affordable housing community’s 22-acre farm for locally-grown organic ingredients.

MIAMI, FL – May 16, 2012 – In a move that aligns a South Florida culinary icon and one of the nation’s most innovative affordable housing projects, Miami Dade College’s (MDC) Tuyo restaurant and Homestead’s Verde Gardens community have formed a new purchasing partnership. Executive Chef Norman Van Aken’s new Downtown Miami hotspot, which sits atop MDC’s new Miami Culinary Institute, is sourcing its produce from a 22-acre organic farm located on the Verde Gardens property, creating new employment opportunities for the community’s 550 formerly homeless residents.

Verde Gardens, a joint venture between the Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust and affordable housing developer Carrfour Supportive Housing, is an affordable housing community in Homestead, Florida, consisting of 145 townhome units for formerly homeless families and individuals. In addition to offering much-needed housing, Verde Gardens yields a positive community impact through its ecological farming component. The community’s 22-acre organic farm – which is operated by Earth Learning, a nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring life-sustaining culture in South Florida – provides residents the opportunity to work on the farm, develop microenterprises and staff a public farmer’s market located on the Verde Gardens property.

On a weekly basis, Tuyo receives boxes and baskets full of produce harvested at the Verde Gardens farm, including everything from arugula to zucchini. The eco-friendly restaurant, which uses locally-sourced ingredients for its menu, plans to purchase year-round seasonal produce items from the Verde Gardens farm to supplement its own edible organic garden at the Miami Culinary Institute located on MDC’s Wolfson campus.

Tuyo’s focus on local farm-to-table produce, coupled with Verde Gardens’ focus on sustainability and independence for families and permaculture farming techniques, makes them perfect partners.

“The same way Carrfour and the Homeless Trust are committed to empowering formerly homeless families by providing a safe, comfortable and affordable place to call home, Chef
Norman Van Aken has built a career around sourcing South Florida ingredients and supporting local communities,” said Stephanie Berman, president of Carrfour Supportive Housing. “Our missions are very much aligned, with the relationship between Verde Gardens and Tuyo serving as a model for future communities in other parts of the country.”

“The relationship between a high-end restaurant, a culinary institute and housing for formerly homeless demonstrates a new paradigm shift,” said Ron Book with The Miami-Dade County Homeless Trust. “This partnership epitomizes what The Homeless Trust does - we create public-private partnerships that help to end homelessness. We hope to replicate the partnership between all parties again and again because it’s not a hand-out program, but a real business that holds huge potential for all involved.”

Tuyo is located at the rooftop of the Miami Culinary Institute at Miami Dade College’s Wolfson campus at 415 NE Second Avenue in Downtown Miami, Florida, and serves as a training facility for MDC culinary arts students.

“There is no end to the possibilities we see with this relationship,” said Van Aken. “We reinforce how well farm-to-table food works. In addition, however, there can be teaching components between students and residents, social work components, food marketing skills training... the opportunities are only limited by our thinking. It’s a relationship no other organization can boast and it’s just getting started!”

Verde Gardens is located at 12550 Community Partnership Drive in Homestead, Florida and is the culmination of a $20 million investment by the Homeless Trust, with Carrfour serving as the project’s construction manager and operator. The community drew praise from President Bill Clinton and former basketball star Alonzo Mourning, who toured the site as part of the Clinton Global Initiative’s Day of Service program in 2010. Verde Gardens’ Homestead Harvest Market is open to the public on Fridays from 2pm to 8pm, and Saturdays from 8am to 1pm.

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