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Practicing the Pitch: Preparation Begins for Participants in the What's Cooking Program

Harrisonburg, VA – The first wave of applications submitted by local food business entrepreneurs to participate in the What's Cooking Program were received by the Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center this week.

Twenty- five applicants are set to participate in a dynamic program offering professional training, workshops and networking opportunities with food industry experts. The program will assist entrepreneurs with market research, product development, financial projections and other important steps as they progress toward the final competition in mid-April 2015. Prizes for the finalists include micro-financing assistance and free time in a certified commercial kitchen.

Of the 25 who have entered the program, seven plan to open their own restaurants. Eight of the applicants are gearing up for various mobile operations including food trucks. The remaining 10 participants range widely in their concept proposals, including plans for retail stores and the production of specialty food items. Ideas include confectionaries, desserts, popcorn, root beer and the preparation of healthy and convenient meals to go, with locally sourced ingredients. The majority of entrepreneurs plan to operate in the downtown Harrisonburg area. Broadway and Dayton have also been identified as locations for food start-up businesses. More than half of the applicants cite financing and marketing as their major challenge. At least six of the participants said they desire access to a certified kitchen to enable them to begin production of specialty foods.

The first Pitch Night will be held Monday, October 27 from 6:30pm until 9pm at the Ice House, 127 West Bruce Street. Members of the community are invited to attend and provide support to the contestants with constructive feedback for the food-related businesses who have registered for the program.

For more information, visit www.ValleySBDC.org/WhatsCooking.

The City of Harrisonburg, Rockingham County, the Small Business Development Center, and Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance partnered to develop this program.