



For Immediate Release  
March 25, 2015

Contact: Allison Dugan  
(540) 568-3227  
[duganaj@jmu.edu](mailto:duganaj@jmu.edu)

## **What's Cooking Competition "Heats up"**

Celebrating Culinary Concepts, with big rewards!

Harrisonburg, VA – The What's Cooking Concept Plan Competition is set to award finalists with thousands of dollars in interest free loans and prizes including commercial kitchen time and an array of professional services packages on April 20, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. The production will feature an esteemed panel of judges and include a "People's Choice" award to be voted on by the public in attendance at the Court Square Theatre.

The Shenandoah Valley Small Business Development Center (SV SBDC), Rockingham County, the City of Harrisonburg, and Harrisonburg Downtown Renaissance created a pilot program that has encouraged entrepreneurs in the food business to consider key success factors in starting a business in the food industry. "At each of our Monday Meetings, we discuss different aspects of their businesses – from marketing to pricing to competitive analysis and lots in between. Our goal in the program is to assist our participants as they test ideas and fine-tune the concepts for viable businesses. All this leads to the Concept Plan Competition on April 20," said Joyce Krech, SV SBDC Director.

The five-month program followed a public information session held last September and kicked off with "Pitch Night" where prospective food business owners received constructive feedback from the community and ideas for their future restaurants, food trucks and specialty food products.

"Being a part of What's Cooking has been a wonderful experience. This program has helped not only me but so many others develop plans, brainstorm and connect with others in the food community. I came to the program with the basic idea of what I wanted to do and with the help of the program I have been able to expand and get from the 'idea stages' to the 'concrete planning stages.' This is an invaluable resource and program to small business owners," says Marsha Hyatt, a local food entrepreneur.

On April 20, approximately 15 contestants will be judged by a panel of industry professionals on the quality and appeal of their verbal and written business concept plans. Respective to their winning title, four contestants will be awarded with no-interest loans in the amounts of \$5,000, \$4,000, \$3,000 and \$2,000 with funds generated in part by the Building Entrepreneurial Economies (BEE) Innovation Grant. Additionally, winners are allotted 50, 40, 30 and 20 hours (also respective to their rank) in the

Massanutten Technical Center's Commercial Kitchen for product testing. Program sponsors Brown, Edwards & Co. and Estland Design will provide winners with free bookkeeping and tax and graphic design services. Vouchers for free workshops and events will be provided by the SV SBDC as well.

Concept Plan competitor Brian Puckett offered his thoughts on the program and upcoming competition – “Well for me, this opportunity is a dream come true. “What’s Cooking’ is what I do and have planned on since I was 5 – to open my own restaurant. With what I learned from the SBDC and our speakers, I feel more knowledgeable about the food business and how to accomplish my dream.”

The People’s Choice Award will be presented to the contestant who receives the highest number of votes from members of the public attending the competition. The award however, will not be factored into the final winning placements, which will be decided by the judges. The judge’s tally and final awards will be announced later that evening at the Capitol Ale House following the main event at Court Square Theatre. To learn about the What’s Cooking program and Concept Plan Competition, call (540) 568-3227 or check the website at [www.valleysbdc.org](http://www.valleysbdc.org)

**About the SV SBDC:** The SV SBDC was established in 1989 at James Madison University. It offers non-fee, confidential consulting services, assists with feasibility studies and business planning and sponsors training events to new and established small and medium-sized businesses in the Shenandoah Valley Region.

# # #