



NEW MEXICO CORRECTIONS DEPARTMENT

MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM, GOVERNOR

Alisha Tafoya Lucero, Cabinet Secretary

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Food Network champion instructs culinary program at State Penitentiary

SANTA FE — Ten incarcerated individuals at the Penitentiary of New Mexico will complete a professional culinary training program this week, culminating in a graduation dinner on Wednesday at 6:30 p.m., open to credentialed media.

The program is led by Chef Fernando Ruiz, a three-time Food Network champion known for victories on Guy’s Grocery Games, Chopped, and Beat Bobby Flay. Chef Ruiz is also the owner and operator of the Santa Fe restaurant, Escondido.

Since launching in 2023, the program has graduated five cohorts at the Penitentiary’s minimum restrict facility. This cohort is the first from its medium security facility to graduate.

The intensive, multi-week culinary training program focused on professional cooking techniques. Graduates of the program earn a certificate from the Entrepreneur Institute of Northern New Mexico, which includes the AAA Food Handler and ServSafe certifications, so that the students leave prison job ready.

“Programs like this demonstrate our department’s strong commitment to providing meaningful training opportunities for inmates at every security level, meeting them where they are, and helping them build the skills they need to become productive members of their communities,” said **Corrections Cabinet Secretary Alisha Tafoya Lucero**. “Through this program, we have already seen participants return to New Mexico communities and secure employment in the culinary industry.”

“Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself,” said **Chef Fernando Ruiz**. “When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.”

Funding for this program is provided through the New Mexico Higher Education

Department's Integrated Education and Training Program, which offers adult learners the opportunity to earn industry-recognized credentials in a high-demand fields.

Members of the credentialed media are invited to cover the dinner event.

WHEN: 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, June 10, 2026

Media must RSVP in advance with Brittany.Roembach@cd.nm.gov

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The New Mexico Corrections Department (NMCD) is one of the largest state agencies in New Mexico. NMCD staff and volunteers are committed to delivering evidence-based Programs across correctional facilities and community supervision settings to support rehabilitation. Through these programs and services, NMCD works to improve outcomes for justice-involved individuals and strengthen public safety statewide.