

# Wine Spectator

Home > News & Features > News

## A Training Ground for Tomorrow's Top Restaurant Staff

**Florida International University's hospitality school opens a cutting-edge facility for restaurant management students**

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Leading executives from the wine and spirits world joined Florida International University staff and students Sept. 19 at the Miami school's Biscayne Bay campus, braving temperatures near 90 to celebrate the ribbon-cutting for the brand new Restaurant Management Lab at the Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism Management. The new facility, paid for by fundraising from the South Beach Wine & Food Festival, will help further FIU's ambition to be one of the nation's top hospitality schools.

"We are lucky enough to have a world-class hospitality school right here in the backyard of our corporate headquarters," said Wayne Chaplin, president and COO of Southern Wine & Spirits, "to produce some of the most talented and well-trained industry professionals that can not only help Southern Wine & Spirits grow in the future but to help grow wine in general in the United States and around the world."

The hospitality program, consistently rated as one of the best in the nation, has more than 1,500 students in its undergraduate and graduate programs at its North Miami campus and another 1,000 at a campus in the port city of Tianjin, China.

"We obsess about our students," said FIU president Mark Rosenberg. "We want to make it better for them so they'll make it better for others. The hospitality industry clearly looks to us and looks to our students."

Chaplin and his father Harvey Chaplin, Southern's chairman and CEO, with the help of other executives such as Mel Dick, president of the wine division, have been the driving force behind the Restaurant Management Lab since it was conceived back in 1997 during a one-day food-and-wine event called the Florida Extravaganza. That affair, which paired local chefs with wines from around the world, later evolved into the Bacchanalian blowout known as the Food Network South Beach Wine & Food Festival. The festival has supported the Chaplin school since.

The design and construction of the impressive 8,000 square-foot facility, which includes the Southern Wine & Spirits Beverage Management Center, took more than four years and cost over \$7.5 million.

"That is the lion's share of what we raised," said Lee Brian Schrage, founder and director of the Wine & Food Festival, now in its 13th year. The festival attracts some 60,000 attendees to south Florida during four days of events held each February at dozens of venues throughout the city. Headlined by big names in the culinary world, from Emeril Lagasse to José Andrés, the festival has to date netted some \$18 million. The money also goes toward scholarships, faculty salaries and grants. (*Wine Spectator* sponsors some events at the festival.)

The impressive multifaceted facility, the work of Coconut Grove-based architects MC Harry & Associates and the interior design firm of Echeverria Design Group Inc. of Coral Gables, is outfitted with high-tech equipment that will

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allow for interactive instruction and streaming dining events and classes. It also introduces students to the latest in point-of-sale systems based on the iPad.

"The most exciting part of this whole project is the technology," said Mike Hampton, dean of the hospitality school. "The lab allows student to model the real world with all the latest equipment. They can work on all the different pieces of what goes into management without risk of failure."

The Beverage Management Lab, explained Hampton, "is focused on how you manage wine, spirits and beer. Students do get exposure to how wine is made but they also get the business enterprise side of it, which is what makes it unique."

The restaurant teaching lab is not open to the public but instead functions as a lab for students to get real exposure to what they will experience in the working world. It has a capacity to seat some 145 "diners" at white tablecloth four-tops as well as another half-dozen at the black marble bar. A centerpiece of the dining room is a two-story, circular wine tower with temperature-controlled wine cabinets and space for approximately 1,400 bottles.

"We have everything," said visiting instructor Mark D'Alessandro, who in his chef whites and toque was proud to give a tour of the back of the house. "From the most basic wood-burning oven to PacoJets and our combi-oven, which costs more than any car I will ever own."

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