Members of the New Community Workforce Development Center Culinary Arts Specialist program recently got an up-close look at Rutgers University-Newark Dining Services, thanks to a partnership with Gourmet Dining, the vendor that has supplied the university with food services since 2016.

Rutgers-Newark Director of Dining Brian Conway showed the students the facility and spoke with them about the industry as a whole.

“I wanted to give them a sense of how their curriculum translates into the real word and give them a sense of what the employer is looking for,” Conway said.

Conway oversees the food service programs for the undergraduate program at Rutgers-Newark, the business school and the law school, which includes four restaurants, a Starbucks and a residential dining facility that provides 3,000 meals a day.

The students not only got the personalized tour, but Conway encouraged all to apply for three open positions available. He said even though not everyone would get a job, it’s a good way to get familiar with the application process.

He also said New Community Workforce Development Center has prepared students in ways that give them a leg up on other applicants.

“The quality of the character of the individuals is something we’re not seeing in the everyday application,” Conway said, pointing out that Workforce Development Center graduates have learned knife skills and sanitation skills, among others. “It’s a mutually beneficial partnership between New Community Workforce Development Center and Rutgers-Newark/Gourmet Dining.”

While the relationship with Rutgers-Newark is relatively new, New Community Workforce Development Center Director Rodney Brutton said, “Gourmet Dining has been a long time supporter of New Community Workforce Development Center’s Culinary Arts Specialist program. We appreciate their willingness to hire our graduates and serve on our employer advisory committee.”

Gourmet Dining, which was founded in 1987, provides food services to more than a dozen colleges in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, as well as correctional facilities. It also operates at Essex County Hospital Center. Gourmet Dining Founder, Chairman and CEO Alfred Frungillo started in the food service industry with a catering company in 1972, Frungillo Caterers. That business still operates today.

Conway said Rutgers-Newark Dining Services and Gourmet Dining Services are committed to Newark and its residents.

The connection to the city goes back much farther than when Gourmet Dining started providing food services for Rutgers. The Frungillo family co-owned a general store in the 1920s on Mount Prospect Avenue and then another store from the 1940s to 1970s on Sixth Avenue.

“We are here in Newark and hire in Newark and develop from Newark,” Conway said.

The opportunity for New Community Workforce Development Center students is great. Those in the Culinary Arts Specialist program have already met Conway, seen the facilities and come from a training program that the company recognizes and respects. All those factors can be extremely helpful when trying to stand out in sea of job seekers.

“No one is as desperate as they used to be,” Conway said. “You’re flooded with applicants for jobs.”