

## PROSTART STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

### Ke'Ajahnai Ridenhour

*Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES,  
Tech Center at Yorktown, NY  
2019 NYSRAEF ProStart Invitational  
Hospitality Management Winner*



**K**e'Ajahnai Ridenhour grew up with an affinity for the kitchen and caretaking. Thinking back to her childhood, Ke remembers, "I grew up at my nana's house, and I was always in the kitchen with her. When I was younger, I wanted to do everything. I wanted to be an artist, I wanted to make movies. But I was always cooking."

When it came time for her to decide what her own future might look like, it took some consideration. She recounts not knowing what she wanted to do and, despite only being a freshman in high school, feeling like she was rapidly running out of time to decide.

After discovering ProStart, Ridenhour had discovered a true sense of purpose, "If I had stayed in [traditional] high school, I wouldn't know what to do. Now I have a path that I'm on, and I know how to get there. If I had not gone those two years ... I don't even know where I would be right now."

Reflecting on her ProStart experience, Ridenhour said, "In addition to learning how to make a resume, I learned how to work well with others. I don't think in school they really teach us how to work with others. With this industry, I'm working directly with people. [I gained] communication skills, how to solve a problem and how to work as a team."

Ridenhour shared her advice to current ProStart students that are just getting started: "Stick to the path you're on. You are already here. You are already a step above your peers because you've decided to join ProStart. Continue this. Trust me. This is for you. You made it this far, you can go even further. Even if you think there is not a job for it, there is. You can do anything you want in this field."

When asked about her experience with The New York State Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (NYSRAEF), Ridenhour said, "Doing ProStart provided me with scholarships, which is one of the reasons why I could come to the Culinary Institute of America. Most of the time when you hear of these organizations, you don't see them. But [NYSRAEF] is very hands on. You were there at the competition. I know you now. It wasn't just a place, it was a person I could talk to."

Ridenhour is currently attending college at the Culinary Institute of America. In the future, she aspires to work in the hospitality field, likely in catering or event planning. She finds satisfaction in watching an event transform into something unique from the ground up, noting how special it is to connect with a client over their occasion. "I want to make people's day," Ridenhour said, "I want to make them happy." 🍴