



## **PRESS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Article by

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### **ADULTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS KNOW HOW TO COOK**

*Civitan Foundation's catering and culinary program thrives thanks to dedicated staff and the talents of people with special needs.*

PHOENIX (February 19, 2018) – Do you know where your meals come from? At a restaurant, you assume your meal is readied by a chef, or even a professional cook. Perhaps, you would believe your lunch at a staff meeting was assembled by a team of sandwich makers from a café with some catchy name. Have you ever thought your meal could have be created by a group of people with special needs with oversight from a highly trained Chef? Welcome to the culinary and catering programs and business at the Life Skill Center for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities of the Civitan Foundation in Phoenix.

Each weekday, people with special needs work in Civitan's commercial kitchen preparing meals for schools and businesses. From salads, sandwiches and wraps, steaks, barbeque, to pastas and deserts, and even special catered events, this team of talented cooks can make it all. With oversight from our very own local Chef Philip Occhipinti. After many years working in corporate culinary programs, Occhipinti now spends his days teaching and training the team of coaches and members in all aspects of daily cooking, food safety, catering and food service.

Civitan provides vocational training and employment opportunities for its members through the Life Skill Center at the Civitan Village in Phoenix. One of the daily programs at the Life Skill Center includes complete training about food safety, food nutrition and basic kitchen skills. These programs are part of a group supported employment program, enabling the members to work with coaches while continually learning and earning an hourly income. The goal of the program is to open doors and build opportunities for the member to eventually work independently.

Known as the **Cookery**, Civitan's kitchen stays busy year-round. Each week the team works with local restaurants for some prep work, lunch cafes at several charter schools (many do not have their own kitchens), and in-house lunches, daily cash café and special events. During the summer months, Civitan participates, and is instrumental in The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) serving and delivering nearly 80,000 USDA-approved meals and snacks for low-income children in north Phoenix when school is not in session, ensuring that low income children continue to receive nutritious meals daily.

The next time you enjoy a meal at a restaurant, sandwich at a meeting, or the food at a catered event, think of who you could be supporting. You are helping to build financial freedom and independence for people with special needs. Thank you!

Have Civitan Cookery cater your next event, help with a special party, lunch and learn, or just a great batch of baked goods, call 602-953-2944 or visit to [www.CivitanFoundationAZ.org](http://www.CivitanFoundationAZ.org).

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**About Bo Larsen**

Bo Larsen joined the Civitan Foundation in November 2017 as the marketing and business development director. He previously served on the Civitan Board of Directors for five years before joining the organization. Larsen has more than 30 years of marketing and media experience, including CNN in Atlanta, director of public relations for Banner Thunderbird Medical Center and director of marketing communications for the City of Peoria.

**About Civitan Foundation, Inc.**

Civitan Foundation, Inc. is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that works to provide our community an accessible, safe and affordable environment while delivering superior life experiences to enhance the quality of life to individuals with developmental disabilities of all ages. Founded in 1968, Civitan is committed to leading Arizona in the provision of unmatched, innovative services to individuals with special needs, becoming the foremost visionary and resource for this valuable community. Civitan's flagship programs include Camp Civitan, a residential camp experience in Williams, Arizona, and the Civitan Foundation Village, a multi-disciplinary day program and vocational training and employment center with opportunities in digital multimedia productions, visual and performing arts, a culinary institute, and sports and health programs. Civitan also offers respite and recreation programs (RSP), home and community based services (HCBS), and food and nutrition programs. Learn more at [www.civitanfoundationaz.com](http://www.civitanfoundationaz.com).