

Resident gets 'Craving' to open eatery in city

Marisa Blackwell of South Orange recently had her dream come true with the opening of Cravings, a gourmet catering, eat in and takeout spot in downtown Newark.

Funded by The Profeta Urban Investment Foundation and mentored by the Rutgers Business School's Center for Urban Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, or CUEED, the new business moves Newark another step forward in its efforts to create a thriving commercial and residential area adjacent to Newark's university community.

Under an outdoor tent decorated for Halloween, more than 100 guests enjoyed a buffet dinner, sipped Blackwell's signature curried eggplant soup and nibbled on chicken teriyaki dumplings to celebrate the grand opening and the culmination of two years of hard work by Blackwell, her business partner and staff

"It's been a very challenging experience, but I would not change anything," Blackwell told the crowd at the opening.

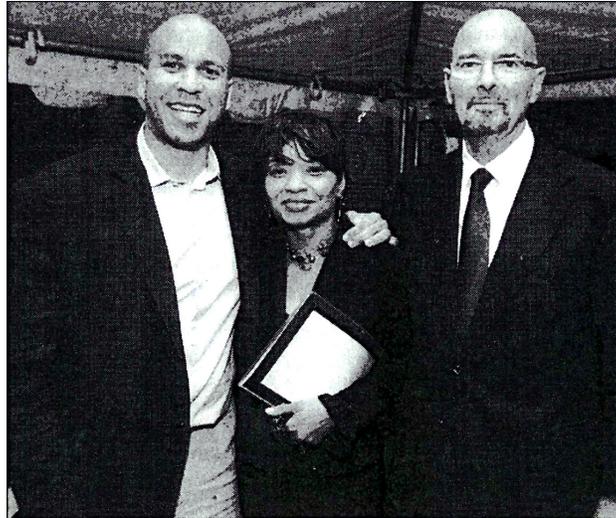
Newark Mayor Cory Booker, Rutgers-Newark Chancellor Steven Diner, Rutgers Executive MBA Director Farrokh Langdana, CUEED Director dt Ogilvie, Paul V. Profeta, CEO of Paul V. Profeta and Associates, and his CFO, Steve Coleman, were on hand to applaud Blackwell's accomplishment and present her with a check of \$155,400 from the Profeta Urban Investment Foundation. Profeta, who started the Foundation in an effort to make Newark a "24/7" city, praised Blackwell and her work ethic.

"That's one courageous lady," he told the crowd, "She's put it all on the line. She works 20 hours a day and she deserves everything she's going to get from this."

The partnership between CUEED at Rutgers Business School and The Profeta Urban Investment Foundation provides funding, resources and business expertise in an effort to attract minority-owned businesses and entrepreneurs to Halsey Street.

The partnership aims to create destinations that will make people want to visit, return and ultimately live in Newark, said Ogilvie.

"She (Blackwell) is now on the frontier of where we're going," he said. Booker thanked Blackwell for investing in the city. Blackwell, a mother of two, has a culinary resume that includes managing food services on the VIP floor at New York Presbyterian Hospital and Windows on the Hud-



Attending the opening of Cravings are Newark Mayor Cory Booker, left, Marisa Blackwell, owner of the restaurant, and Paul Profeta, CEO of Paul Profeta & Associates.

son, a fine-dining restaurant and banquet hall in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y. She has catered events for the Rutgers Executive MBA program for several years. Langdana was one of those who encouraged Blackwell to open her own business.

"The real recovery in this country is going to come from the Marisa's of this nation," Langdana said, noting how Blackwell started cooking at 3:30 a.m. for his program. "This has been a labor of love for Marisa."

The partnership between CUEED, the university, the city of Newark and private investors is the first of its kind in the nation to incubate small and mid-sized

minority businesses in urban areas.

The idea was first brought up by Profeta in 2007. He convinced Michael Cooper, dean of the Business School, to form CUEED, which he funded in order to get it off the ground. Entrepreneurs apply to CUEED for capital to launch, grow or expand their businesses.

Students in the MBA program review applications, suggest which ones to fund to Profeta's Foundation and then mentor the businesses, offering analysis and advice to enhance the prospects of success.

"This is exactly the kind of community engagement a university should be involved in," said Diner. "Ultimately, it's just going to make the university that much greater to be in a vibrant, 24/7 downtown."

Cravings is the fourth business born out of this collaborative effort. The Coffee Cave and Porta Print Publishing, both on Halsey Street, are the first two. The third is a financial services firm founded by people with disabilities at One Washington St.

Profeta, who was raised in Maplewood but spent his childhood in Newark, has funneled \$1 million of his own money into the Profeta Urban Investment Foundation to provide capital resources through the CUEED project. Blackwell received an interest-free loan to help her launch Cravings. Blackwell said Profeta had not only supported her through the foundation, but also provided her with friendship, support, advice and guidance for two years.

"Who says there are no knights in shining armor?" Blackwell said to Profeta, holding back tears. "I only hope one day that I, or my children, or my children's children, are in a position to do for someone what you have done for me."