

Dominican graduate cooks for First Lady in White House

Aikens, who is a nationally-known chef and educational advocate, cooked for First Lady Michelle Obama and children at the annual fall harvest of the White House Kitchen Garden on October 14. In celebration of Farm to School Month, the First Lady invited students from schools in California, Arizona, and Ohio to participate in the fall harvest. These schools were selected because they are participating in programs that incorporate fresh, local food into their school meals, and they teach students about healthy eating through school gardens and nutrition education.

"She outworked us all in the garden. She came down with her work gloves and her boots. You could tell she truly loved working in the garden," said Aikens, who phoned his mother in his home state of Georgia to tell her about the experience.

"It was an incredible day. I told the First Lady that people all over the country who knew I was coming have asked me if she is nice. I explained to them I have not met her so I would let them know afterward. I told her "With your permission can I tell them you are?" She smiled. That made me feel great."

Aikens was one of three chefs chosen to be paired with three Kids' "State Dinner" healthy recipe winners at the fall harvest. He cooked with 10-year-old Mira Solomon of Atlanta for "Grillin' Out Veggie Style." All 54 winners of this year's Kids' "State Dinner" were paired up with chefs in their communities to host free and healthy cooking demonstrations this fall. These cooking demos will help support efforts to build and teach basic cooking skills to kids and families in communities across the country.

Aikens' career began in Marin County where he started his own produce business, a company called Peaches. That put him on the path to appear on The Food Network and become a graduate student at Dominican. He came through the [Department of Education at Dominican](#) and enrolled in Dominican's "[Courage to Teach®](#)" program.

"Every day I spent on the Dominican campus and every person I met has helped me every day," Aikens said. "When I think about the four pillars (Study, Reflection, Community, Service) it gives me the strength, it gives me the courage, it gives me the sense of community that Dominican is all about.

"Dominican lives in me. Dominican lives with me. I was able to get back in the media and do what I did before because of the things I learned on the campus of Dominican University with the wonderful instructors, professors librarians and coaches. We have a wonderful family at Dominican."