Foodlink celebrates new state-of-the-art kitchen

The regional food bank, Foodlink, celebrated the opening of its new community kitchen on Wednesday.

The 28,000 square foot facility will enable Foodlink to accomplish three distinctive initiatives: production, processing and people, according to Executive Director Julia Tedesco.

"We'll be able to produce more healthy meals for kids across the city of Rochester. We'll be able to do small scale processing, and invest in local agriculture and expand markets for locally grown produce, and we'll be able to invest in people through a one of a kind culinary workforce development program," she said.

The commercial kitchen is expected to produce over 20,000 healthy meals each day for school lunch and after-school program sites.

Mayor Lovely Warren says this is a great way to make sure city kids have access to quality food.

"To have a state-of-the-art facility that's not just providing quality food to our families but one that is also providing jobs is what we appreciate and are excited about," she said.

The project will retain 77 jobs and add over 30 new positions.

The kitchen will also boost agriculture by purchasing more local produce for its Value-Added Processing Center.

Regional Director for Empire State Development, Vinnie Esposito says ESD contributed $1 million toward the project, noting the community kitchen will create a hub of regional agricultural activity and job development.

"There's no doubt going to be benefit to local farmers and the agricultural industry. But ensuring that people who are economically disadvantaged and pathways to good paying jobs, is one of things we focus most on. This project does both of those things really well," he said.

Tedesco adds that the project is the vision of Foodlink's late founder, Tom Ferraro.
"Many, many years ago, he dreamed up a kitchen that could feed the children in this city and train people for the growing food industry. And today, we see that dream come alive," she said.

Major donors to the $4.9 million project – Wegmans, Greater Rochester Health Foundation, and Empire State Development -- were represented at the ceremony for the facility on Mt. Read Blvd.

Governor Cuomo issued a statement saying the project "will broaden access to fresh food, provide employees with skills they need for future success, and support efforts to reduce poverty and end hunger across the region."