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Visit from Paco Saldana Provides Hospitality Students with Real World Experiences *Saldana Recently Named “Face of Travel” in Nationwide Survey*

On Thursday, September 17, 2009, hospitality students and faculty from Montgomery College and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and leaders from the hospitality industry will come together to hear Paco Saldana share his inspirational story and encourage students to complete their college education. Saldana, who was selected in a nationwide competition earlier this year to be the first “Face of Travel” for the U.S. Travel Association, is director of guest services at The Ritz-Carlton in Amelia Island, Fla.

The evening will start with a meet and greet reception at 6 p.m. at the Universities of Shady Grove, located in Rockville, Md., followed by a dinner that is being planned, prepared and hosted by the students. Saldana will share his experiences with students during the dinner program, and then the students will have an opportunity to discuss the business aspects of the economic crisis and hospitality business’s response with a panel of professors and local hotel managers.

This event is just one example of the special learning opportunities made possible by the relationship between The J. Willard and Alice S. Marriott Foundation, Marriott International, Montgomery College and the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. This partnership provides students with access to industry experts, new course offerings, internships, scholarships and the opportunity to receive an associate’s and/or bachelor’s degree without leaving Montgomery County. The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company LLC, for which Saldana is an employee, is an independently operated division of Marriott International.

Saldana arrived in the United States in the mid-1990’s, unable to speak English, with no experience, little money, but a determination to succeed. “I came to this country in search of the American dream, and as an employee of The Ritz-Carlton, I’ve been given the opportunity to achieve it,” said Saldana. “But like the millions of other people working in the travel industry, these aspirations could be cut short if the downturn in travel continues. I want to encourage these students to continue with their studies and appreciate this is still a business where you can start at the bottom and work your way up, as I have done now as director of guest services.”

Now a U.S. citizen, Saldana will talk to students about the economic recession’s toll on the hospitality industry, which resulted in the loss of jobs, especially at hotels and resorts.

The U.S. Travel Association launched “The Faces of Travel” contest in April to identify the person who best exemplified the jobs, opportunities and hope created by the hospitality industry. After an online election process, Saldana won with more than 16,000 votes cast nationwide. Saldana will be in Washington, D.C. to visit Congressional lawmakers and to speak on behalf of the 7.7 million Americans whose jobs depend upon travel.

For more information about Montgomery College’s hospitality management program, visit <http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/hospitality/>.

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Montgomery College is a public, open admissions community college with campuses in Germantown, Rockville, and Takoma Park/Silver Spring, plus workforce development/continuing education centers and off-site programs throughout Montgomery County, Md. The College serves nearly 60,000 students a year, through both credit and noncredit programs, in more than 100 areas of study.