



Photo submitted by FOX.

Education alumnus Gerron Hurt earned two masters in 2018

One at Lipscomb, and one on MasterChef

Lipscomb University student and Lumination reporter Sara Jones contributed to this report.

For **Gerron Hurt**, a 25-year old teacher at Nashville's LEAD Academy High School, 2018 was a year of celebration. First he enjoyed a graduation celebration when he earned his Master of Education from Lipscomb in May. Then in September he enjoyed a nationally televised celebration when he won the Fox reality show cooking competition MasterChef.

Hurt, an English teacher at LEAD for more than three years, won a \$250,000 prize and is working to use some of his

winnings to begin a culinary program for students at LEAD, a Nashville public charter school designated for low income students.

Not only did Hurt earn his master's from Lipscomb and an ELL (English Language Learning) certificate this past May, but he did it while filming the Season 9 episodes of MasterChef, which took him away from campus for several weeks to film the show in Los Angeles.

"I gave him the syllabus and all the assignments ahead of time, and he had the textbook," said **Jeanne Fain**, a professor of education at Lipscomb who came to know Hurt well. "You have

to be extremely organized to earn a master's and be on a reality show and go right back to teaching at LEAD, so his organizational skills are really good."

No doubt. On the episodes leading up to the finals, Hurt was required to make three chocolate desserts at one time as well as prepare a three-course meal of risotto, salmon and sticky toffee pudding, all in one time period.

Throughout the show, Hurt, a native of Louisville, Kentucky, drew on his roots to create innovative versions of Southern staples. For the finale menu, Hurt did a spin on Nashville hot chicken to create a "Nashville hot quail"



appetizer, a version of shrimp and grits with prawns for the entrée and an amaretto chess pie for dessert.

Hurt began cooking around the age of 5, he said. “Growing up, I was always interested in what my Mom was cooking because I loved to eat,” said Hurt. “My mom would say, ‘Come into this kitchen because I don’t want you to be waiting on a woman to cook your meal!’”

As he grew older, Hurt loved to watch cooking shows on the Food Network and shows featuring the MasterChef host Gordon Ramsay, international chef and restaurateur.

In 2013, Hurt’s mother passed away, an event that impacted him greatly both spiritually and in his culinary journey.

“I have always been a religious person, but it wasn’t until my mother’s death that I truly established a one-on-one relationship with God,” Hurt said. “Losing my mom made me challenge what God had in store for my life, but going to church and constantly talking to God allowed me to rekindle my faith and to put all of my trust in Him. Without the Lord, none of my accomplishments would be possible! I owe it all to Him!”

He attended Western Kentucky University for his undergraduate degree and then came to Nashville as part of the Nashville Teacher Residency program, which recruits and trains recent college graduates to become math and English teachers in Nashville’s low-income public middle and high schools. The residency program

has a partnership with Lipscomb for master’s-level course work.

Hurt said he appreciates his time at Lipscomb for the relevant tools he received and strong foundation it provided. “Lipscomb’s program really, really prepared me to be able to truly accommodate my ELL students and differentiate my lesson plans accordingly,” said Hurt.

Hurt is quite popular at LEAD Academy High School, he says, because in addition to filling his students’ heads with a good grasp of language and writing, he also fills their tummies with good food on a regular basis. “I cook all the time for

my students, and they are so grateful for every meal I cook for them. I make a buffalo chicken dish that they beg for every week,” he said.

“Throughout the season, Gerron displayed the drive and characteristics we so often ask of one another and, especially, our students,” said LEAD Academy’s CEO Dwayne Tucker. “He was courageous in trying out for the show in the first place. He was committed, disciplined and self-reliant in his approach to the competition and the way in which he talked about his students and his passion for them was the very definition of serving others.”

Hurt still recalls the intimidation he felt cooking for chef Ramsay. In order to get past his fears, he reminded himself that Ramsay was a regular person, just like

him, and he focused on the support he received from his friends and family.

“I am about food that speaks to the soul and food that is influenced by family,” Hurt said.

In addition to the culinary program at LEAD, Hurt also plans to travel the world learning about food cuisine and to possibly establish a food truck or a pop-up restaurant in Nashville. He will also participate in Camp MasterChef, an immersive summer camp the show holds for kids ages 8-16.

Hurt said he feels he was fairly represented as who he really is on MasterChef, and Fain agrees.

“He is so amazing! Before he went, I had a chance to pray with him, because he was really nervous. He gave me this big bear hug,” said Fain. “He is so genuine. That is really who he is (on the show). They haven’t edited him or framed him in a different way.”

As an educator, Fain is excited that Hurt has had the opportunity to represent a positive attitude toward learning, she said.

“He has demonstrated really well what it is like to take constructive feedback positively and learn from it,” she said. “He is a great example of what a lifelong learner looks like. He has learned from everything and doesn’t let criticism beat him up, but instead really tries hard not to make the same mistake. He’s a really great example for our students.”

© To see the original, longer version of this article go to bit.ly/HurtMasterChef.

“I am about food that speaks to the soul and food that is influenced by family.”