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Anthony Bourdain Culinary Alma Mater Serves Up Municipal Bonds.

The Culinary Institute of America is betting that the country's food obsession is here to stay, and that investors want seats at the table.

The school that trained famed chefs such as Anthony Bourdain and Cat Cora is selling \$15 million of tax-exempt municipal bonds Tuesday to raise cash for renovations at its California facilities, one of which it bought late last year. In September, the non-profit educator will sell \$42 million for improvements to its Hyde Park, New York, headquarters and, in a bit of fiscal housecleaning, retire more expensive debt and finance payments to end derivative contracts.

As more traditional universities struggle to attract students amid rising costs, the Culinary Institute, which calls itself the "world's premier culinary college," has seen steady enrollment. The school says it wants to expand its programs to all facets of the food business as its almost 50,000 alumni have helped create a landscape where even chain restaurants cite the provenance of their ingredients.

"The CIA's reputation and market-driven program offerings will continue to support stable enrollment," Moody's Investors Service analysts Susan Shaffer and Dennis Gephardt wrote in a report. Still, it is in a niche market and is highly reliant on student charges' for revenue, said the credit arbiter, which ranks the bonds Baa2, two steps above speculative grade.

The institute's sale through the California Statewide Communities Development Authority will finance construction at a downtown Napa center that will open next month. The school is also expanding its St. Helena, California, campus called Greystone.

"We're looking to provide more than just great chefs," said Maria Krupin, the college's vice president for finance. "We're looking to encompass and advance the industry in health and wellness, sustainability, food ethics and food policy- this is all coming to the forefront now. "

Next month's sale through New York's Dutchess County Local Development Corporation will fund renovations in Hyde Park, where the college moved in 1972 after it outgrew the Connecticut site that in 1946 was the first institute of its kind. School officials will also refund existing bonds and terminate one of four swap agreements at a cost of around \$4 million. That helps reduce the risks to the non-profit, which is on the losing end of the transactions and has to post collateral to the banks as a result.

Budding chefs this year pay \$40,690 a year in tuition and housing fees. During the previous academic year, 2,940 students enrolled compared with 2,785 five years ago, when fees totaled \$35,965, documents circulated among investors show. The institute also has campuses in Texas and Singapore.

The school's reputation and programs help it compete among both traditional four-year universities and hospitality centers, Moody's said in the report.

Krupin said the school is selective with applicants to maintain its prestige and doesn't try to boost admissions for revenue. "We're growing at a pace in which we can maintain quality education that we're known for," she said.

Bloomberg Business

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August 15, 2016 — 2:00 AM PDT

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