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2,500 FREE MEALS ON THANKSGIVING SEASONED BY MADISON CHEFS



COOK it
FORWARD

With unemployment persisting as the pandemic rages onward, and a growing number of individuals and families experiencing food insecurity, a local Madison campaign founded in June by Downtown Madison restaurateurs called 'Cook It Forward' continues to cook and distribute free individually-packaged healthy, fresh meals.

Downtown Madison restaurant owners, Francesca Hong, (Chef/Co-Owner, Morris Ramen), Patrick Sweeney, and Joshua Berkson (Managing Partners of Rule No. 1 Hospitality Group, which owns Merchant and Lucille) are founding members of a campaign called 'Cook It Forward'. Francesca Hong was recently elected State Representative of the 76th Assembly District. She will become the first Asian American to serve in the Wisconsin State Legislature.

The campaign has an initial goal of 50,000 free meals. Their goal for distributing Thanksgiving meals is 2,500 meals.

"Cook It Forward is our community response to partner with chefs and restaurants to produce and deliver healthy individually-packaged meals to food access areas here in Madison, as identified by the City of MADison as having the highest levels of food insecurity," says Mel Trudeau, who volunteers for CIF and heads up Donor Development. "Using donated dollars we are paying each entity in our food system an equitable wage to produce and deliver that food, uplifting each stakeholder as we go."

Cook It Forward's starting roster of independent and locally-owned restaurants includes, but is not limited to: Ancora Coffee, Banzo, Casetta, Gates & Brovi, Harvest, La Kitchenette, Lucille, Madtown Food Services Marigold, Merchant, Morris Ramen, Pasture & Plenty, Sardine, and The Old Fashioned. The campaign uses donated dollars to pay participating restaurants \$10/meal, which in turn helps the restaurants to pay workers, rent, and their suppliers, including supporting local farms, producers, and distributors. The campaign also allocates donated dollars for local drop-off sites and 'last-mile' distribution partners, 85% of which are Black- and Brown-led nonprofits such as FOSTER, Urban Triage, Me to We, Freedom, Inc., and EOTO+.

"The word 'restaurant' derives from the French verb *restaurer*, meaning "to restore". We love this idea of food as medicine and using restaurants as community agents to uplift and bring communities together," says Joshua Berkson. "Our method of aggregating meals across multiple restaurants, caterers, and community kitchens in partnership with local non-profits increases our reach and allows us to scale bringing more chefs and restaurants into action. "We are actively raising dollars to this end."

"Cook It Forward's initial goal is to raise enough money to deliver 50,000+ healthy meals to those in need, especially among communities of color who are disproportionately affected by the pandemic" says Francesca Hong. "Thanksgiving is an important time to focus on those who want and need a comforting meal. We are really mobilizing."

The campaign has raised about \$64,000 in individual donations via their website and restaurant partners, and almost \$200,000 through community-minded corporate giving including American Family Insurance, Zendesk, Exact Sciences, Titos' Vodka, The Taste of Madison Gives Back, Frank Productions, and others.

"These meals are deliciously prepared. Getting a meal like this, especially during this time is really a mental reprieve from all of the stressors going on," says Alnisa Allgood, Executive Director of Collaboration for Good, a local non-profit that provides targeted capacity building services including communication and coordination with direct response providers who represent and work with the unmet food demand. Patrick Sweeney adds, "We are providing comfort, health, and hope in every meal. As we continue to inspire those three things each week doing this, we are fulfilling our collective culinary mission."

Donations and additional campaign information can be found at www.cookitforwardmadison.com/

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