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AWARD WINNING NONPROFIT FARMS WORK WONDERS ANNOUNCES OPENING OF NEW RESTAURANT IN APPALACHIA

New restaurant to provide jobs and food service training to local West Virginia youth under the leadership of chefs from Michelin-starred DC restaurants

Restaurant will provide “living classrooms” model pioneered by award-winning social enterprise Farms Work Wonders over the past seven years

August 15, 2023; WARDENSVILLE, WV– Today the award-winning nonprofit organization Farms Work Wonders announced the launch of its fifth rural Appalachian social enterprise—a full-service restaurant and bar called Mack’s Bingo Kitchen. The restaurant will complement other successful living classroom social enterprises created by Farms Work Wonders, which include an organic farm, market, bakery and glass blowing studio where local youth learn real-world work, life and leadership skills.

Opening Thursday, August 17, 2023, Mack’s Bingo Kitchen will be a casual American restaurant that utilizes seasonal ingredients from its own organic farm as well as from other nearby farms and purveyors. “We have two main goals at Mack’s Bingo: number one - to provide a well-rounded hospitality experience for youth and number two - to provide a casual and approachable, yet exceptional experience through food, drink and hospitality,” shared Seth Wells, Farms Work Wonders Culinary Director, whose previous role was Culinary Director of Rose’s Restaurant Group, which includes Michelin-star Rose’s Luxury, Pineapple and Pearls, and Little Pearl in Washington, DC.
In addition to providing extraordinary service and food, Mack’s Bingo Kitchen will serve as a teaching and coaching environment where youth will engage with all aspects of the front- and back-of-house restaurant operations for a comprehensive, well-rounded experience in the hospitality industry. Local teens within the Farms Work Wonders programs are also encouraged to explore, discover, and dream in a safe environment while being challenged to try new things.

The restaurant has brought about a surge of employment opportunities, generating more than 30 new jobs in the small community of Wardensville, which boasts a population of 270 residents. The restaurant's notable dedication to the local workforce is evident, with over 80% of the new staff originating from the Wardensville area, and a quarter of the initial team consisting of local youth who gained prior experience via the Farms Work Wonders program.

“I have been working at Farms Work Wonders in a variety of positions since high school, starting out at the farm, then moving to the bakery and then as a glass blowing assistant,” said Kollin Quarles, “My dream has always been to work in the restaurant industry and now I will get to do that as well.” Another youth that has been working in the program since high school, Elvira Camarillo says, “I started at the market, moved to the bakery, and then got invited to work in culinary. It’s been awesome working with the restaurant team, they’ve been teaching me new things I didn’t know and showing me new techniques.”

Leading the new restaurant team is Culinary Director Seth Wells. Born in North Carolina and raised in a similarly rural area, Seth is no stranger to Appalachia; he spent several years living in Woodstock, VA and has been a frequent visitor to Hardy County as part of a dedicated crew of long-distance cycling friends who bike throughout the county. Prior to attending Johnson & Wales University in Charlotte, NC, Seth cooked in a small pizza shop, unaware that his future in the hospitality industry would be for the long haul. After cooking in various kitchens around the country, Wells landed in Washington, DC, where he spent 12 years learning from others and finding his philosophy on food and hospitality.

In late 2021, Seth left his role as Culinary Director of Rose’s Restaurant Group and joined the Farms Work Wonders team as Culinary Director, moving his family to Wardensville. “I spent the first couple years of my daughter’s life hoping that she would never work in hospitality due to some of the negative aspects of the restaurant industry,” Seth admits. “After initial conversations with the Jonathan D + Mark C. Lewis Foundation, I was encouraged that we had an opportunity to make a positive impact on the hospitality industry showing how things can, and could be, done differently.”

Challenging the status quo is nothing new for Farms Work Wonders or their lead investor - the Jonathan D + Mark C. Lewis Foundation. “The foundation has always been willing to take bold risks to create a more equal, just, and progressive world,” said Paul Yandura, Jonathan D + Mark C. Lewis Foundation CEO. “Our mission is to empower the next generation. And we do that by refusing to accept the world as it is and instead, create the world we want to live in.” Paul has also
lived in Wardensville since 2012 and serves in a dual role with the foundation and as President of Farms Work Wonders, managing the launch and growth of the project since 2016.

To round out the super star management team, Seth recruited Vincent Falcone as Executive Chef, who worked at Rose’s Luxury before moving on to Ellē, and most recently Tigerella. Caitlyn Reed, also of Ellē, was brought on as General Manager. Adam Steuedler, formerly of The Buttery in Millwood, VA, was brought on as Sous Chef.

“While we were planning this extraordinary restaurant over the past several years, even having to put everything on hold due to COVID, we never dreamed that we would be able to attract Michelin-star level talent and a true dream team to our tiny town,” said Jason Smith, Farms Work Wonders Managing Director. “The uber talented team will provide unrivaled learning opportunities that larger towns could only dream of providing to their local youth and community.”

Mack’s Bingo Kitchen is located at 155 West Main Street in Wardensville, WV. For comprehensive details about Farms Work Wonders, please visit the newly revamped website at farmsworkwonders.org. To stay updated with the latest from Mack’s Bingo Kitchen, you can follow them on Instagram @macksbingo.

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Farms Work Wonders is an award-winning food, farm, and arts-based non-profit social enterprise. Our mission is to ignite the spark of curiosity within Appalachian youth so they see themselves and their futures in new and exciting ways. From day one, we offer more than a job. Through paid on-the-job training, enrichment classes, and civic engagement, we provide a safe and supportive environment where youth explore, challenge, discover, and dream. This multifaceted approach maximizes all the benefits of youth employment and transforms the workplace and our social enterprise businesses into dynamic Living Classrooms.

All enterprises in the Farms Work Wonders family reinvest 100% of their profits back into their youth programming. These include the Wardensville Garden Market, Lewis Farm, Mack’s Bingo Kitchen, Mack’s Bingo Bakery, and Dakota Glass Works.