

Chef Action Network brings culinary leaders to Asheville

(Photo: Courtesy photo)

ASHEVILLE - Chefs and culinary leaders from around the country will arrive here next week for the first Chef Action Network salon, focusing on food policies at the state and local levels.

"Chefs at Work on Policy and Change," an event held in partnership with the James Beard Foundation on Feb. 1-2 at The Market Place Restaurant, will be hosted by Asheville Chef William Dissen and Chef Hari Pulapaka, of Cress Restaurant in Deland, Florida. Both organizations are working to empower those in the culinary industry to tackle food policy.



Included in the meeting are nationally renowned writers, producers and food justice advocates, including author and heirloom seed saver Bill Best from Berea, Kentucky; country ham celebrity Allan Benton from Madisonville, Tennessee; Appalachian food writer and author Ronni Lundy from Burnsville; and Jane Black, author and contributor to Saveur Magazine.

"It started in July of 2012 with our first Chefs Boot Camp for policy and change," said CAN Executive Director Katherine Miller. "Chefs all give so much of themselves, their time and their food all the time. We thought what if we could harness this collective power of chefs and unleash them to focus on policy and changing our food system? We help chefs understand how to get involved beyond fundraising."

The February meeting will allow chefs, academicians, social activists and food producers to network and interact, discussing issues from child nutrition to food labeling to GMOs to antibiotic reform. The goal is to help the attendees "examine their networks and figure out where they have voice and influence," said Miller.

CAN hosts regular advocacy days in Washington as well as in state capitals as a way to generate discussion of food policy and food security.

Dissen has been active in the organization and has attended advocacy events. "He is committed to sustainability, local sourcing, and support of the local food shed," said Miller. "He has the leadership qualities we look for."

Miller also said from a regional perception standpoint, holding the meeting in Appalachia was important.

"This region has been associated historically with stereotyping of obesity, diabetes and malnutrition. But you are doing amazing things in Asheville from a food standpoint," Miller said. "There's such a richness of heritage of the region and people are excited about Asheville. There's lots of culinary leadership there, lots of great thinking and agitation coming out of Asheville. This community is rich with stories to tell and expertise to share. This won't be the last time we come to Asheville."

The meeting will culminate in a dinner for the attendees Feb. 3 at the restaurant. For information, visit www.marketplace-restaurant.com

About the organizations

CAN is a nonprofit organization focused on harnessing the power of America's preeminent chefs in support of a strong, sustainable, just and healthy food system www.chefactionnetwork.com The James Beard Foundation celebrates, nurtures, and honors America's diverse culinary heritage through programs that educate and inspire.

www.jamesbeard.org

Culinary fire power

A roster of some of the most celebrated chefs in the region, including multiple James Beard Award winners and several Beard Award semi-finalists, will attend and participate in the event including:

Richard Arbaugh, South Hills Market and Café, Charleston, West Virginia

Katie Button, Curate and Nightbell, Asheville

Ashley Christensen, Poole's Diner, Raleigh

William Dissen, The Market Place, Asheville

John Fleer, Rhubarb, Asheville

Damian Heath, Lot 12 Public House, Berkeley Springs, West Virginia

Meherwan Irani, Chai Pani, Asheville

Anthony Lamas, Seviche, Louisville, Kentucky

Joseph Lenn, J.C. Holdway, Knoxville, Tennessee

Travis Milton, Shovel & Pick, Richmond, Virginia

Annie Pettry, Decca, Louisville, Kentucky

Hari Pulapaka, Cress, Deland, Florida

Levon Wallace, Cochon Butcher, Nashville, Tennessee

Plus, sommelier Jenneffer Pulapaka, Cress, Deland, Florida