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### Buying a meal will feed a hungry neighbor at Feed the World Cafe

ZINTA AISTARS | THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2014



Patrick Mixis was appalled to find out how many hungry people there are in Kalamazoo. So he set about opening a restaurant that will help feed them as its customers get fed. Zinta Aistars has the story on Feed the World Cafe.

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It's a stunning statistic: 24 percent of all households in Kalamazoo County qualify as ALICE households. ALICE is an acronym coined by [United Way](#) in collaboration with Rutgers University to designate Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed people who are working at one or more jobs, yet are still falling behind.

Forty percent of Michigan households, according to the [ALICE Project](#), a report issued by United Way and Rutgers University, earn too little to afford basic needs.

In Kalamazoo County, 24 percent translates to more than 24,000 households, with more than another 17,000 households living under the poverty line. ALICE households, the report states, include both genders, young and old, and those of all races.

"I was taking a class at Western Michigan University on current social issues, including world hunger, and I was shocked to learn about some of these numbers," says Patrick Mixis, who graduated from WMU in the spring 2014 with a degree in food service management.

"I thought, 'How devastating; so many people going hungry,'" and then, he started thinking what he might do about it. One in six children, he learned, didn't know from one day to the next if he or she would eat a meal that day.



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"Patrick came to me with this idea about opening a restaurant that would share its profits with nonprofits feeding the hungry," says his mom, Debra Mixis. "I've been working with nonprofits for 25 years; I loved his idea. I got really excited, but I wanted him to finish school first. He held onto that idea for two years."

Good ideas don't fade with time. As soon as he graduated, Patrick Mixis was ready to roll up his white chef's sleeves and get to work.

"At least a quarter of my classes were culinary," he says. "I worked at Food Dance Cafe and Monaco Bay. I interned at Casa Bolero and the chef there, Jared Dellario, mentored me as I developed the business idea. I worked at the microbrewery in Portage. John Tsui at Chinn Chinn gave me some great ideas with the start-up and kitchen design."

Chef Howie Peak, now at the Radisson was another mentor. And more help came from John Mueller, professor of entrepreneurship at Western Michigan University. He helped Patrick develop the business plan that led to the purchase of the Blackeye Espresso Cafe after it came up for sale shortly after Patrick graduated.

Debra Mixis and her business partner, Lori Shugars invested in the Blackeye Espresso Cafe at 7000 Stadium Drive, which will be the first Feed the World Cafe. It now serves coffee and lunch, but they were willing to turn it over to the young chef to bring about his idea.

He brought his longtime friend and neighbor Kurt Shugars, Lori Shugars' son, on board to supervise the servers, while Patrick took on chef duties as kitchen manager. The new restaurant will be renamed [Feed the World Cafe](#) after a full kitchen is installed.

In September 2014, Mixis and Shugars, mothers and investors, were granted the last liquor license in Oshtemo Township, giving them permission to serve beer and wine at the new restaurant.

"The Township issued us a tavern license when they heard what we were planning to do. They really liked the idea," says Debra Mixis.

The idea, now the plan: For each meal the restaurant sells, their nonprofit partners will receive a percentage of the profits to help feed the hungry in Kalamazoo County. Those partners include [Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes](#), [Food Bank of South Central Michigan](#), and [Ministry with Community](#).

Debra Mixis says they anticipate providing at least 40,000 meals to the community in the first year of operation.

"We are also proud to serve Counter Culture coffee, the first Direct Trade Certified coffee company, roasted just for us and shipped direct," she says. "We have just added organic tea blends and have a tea menu available daily as well as fresh brewed iced tea."

As Blackeye Espresso Cafe transitions in coming weeks to Feed the World Café, the lunch menu will expand into a full menu.

The new chef hesitates to reveal too much, but brims with excitement as he considers the menu he will be putting together. He offers hints.

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"I want to use unique ingredients, a worldly cuisine," he says. "Local, organic, yes, but also foods like dragon fruit used in rubs for salmon and chicken ... a new take on Oysters Rockefeller, you know, classics with a new twist ... maybe a Red Snapper ceviche as an appetizer. Relatively high end."

"We'll track the number of meals sold," says Debra Mixis. "We're talking to the nonprofits about their cost to feed people, and we'll work with that to make it truly one-for-one meal. We'll probably make our donation monthly or quarterly. Signage in the restaurant will explain to customers what we are doing and how they are contributing."

"I'm anxious to get going," Patrick Mixis says. "I want to make a difference. I didn't go on study abroad in college, but I saw hunger as part of my own lifestyle, as a college student. Students, too, can really struggle with their food budgets."

"He saw a different culture during college than the one in which he grew up," adds Debra Mixis.

They plan a soft opening in November, in collaboration with their nonprofit partners. Remodeling is underway in a style Debra Mixis refers to as modern urban upscale, with a stone fireplace and an outdoor patio.

"We see this is as just the beginning," she says. "We are creating a brand. We'll have shelves up front with local food for sale—local businesses grown out of Can-Do Kitchen like Lush Nut, Busy Bread, and others. Patrick is thinking about making organic dog treats to sell, too."

Gluten-free, organic, vegan food options will also be available.

"We want people to get interested in the concept," says Debra Mixis. "People often want to get involved in helping their community. This will be a conscious decision, a way to do that."

As for working side-by-side with his mom, the young chef grins, then laughs. "As long as she stays out of the kitchen!"

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The Blackeye Espresso Cafe is open Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Saturday 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.; closed on Sunday. Call 269.353.6620 or email [info@feedtheworldcafe.com](mailto:info@feedtheworldcafe.com) for more information.

Feed the World Cafe will be a full service restaurant, serving lunch and dinner. The hours have not yet been determined.

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*Photos by [Susan Andress](#).*