

DAVE "D.K." KODAMA modeled "Chefs Fight Hunger" after participating in the "Taste of the NFL," an annual event that takes place the eve before every Super Bowl Sunday.





Great Chefs Fight Hunger

Armed with credentials from some of the best restaurants, culinary giants team up to fight against Hawaii's hungry.

BY KRISTEN NEMOTO

ACCORDING TO CHEF Dave "D.K." Kodama, if you cook it, they will come. And since 2005, nearly 600 have done so in a single night. Along with fellow chefs around Oahu, Kodama will once again team up with the Hawaii Foodbank to host this year's 8th annual "Great Chefs Fight Hunger," Saturday, March 23 at the Foodbank warehouse in Mapunapuna.

"Great Chefs is just a natural way for us to give back," says Kodama, owner of D.K. Restaurants and original founder of the "Great Chefs Fight Hunger" event. "The Hawaii Foodbank has done a tremendous job of transforming what we do best into a fundraiser; we're just happy to be able to help."

In 2002, Kodama was Hawaii's first chef to participate in the "Taste of the NFL," an annual fundraiser held the eve before every Super Bowl Sunday since



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1991. In an effort to raise funds for food banks affiliated with the hunger-relief nonprofit, Feeding America, the “Taste of the NFL” has become a symbiotic partnership between nationally-ranked chefs and local Foodbanks. After a couple of years participating in the lavish event, Kodama had the idea to replicate the same fundraiser with Hawaii’s own talented chefs and local Foodbank branch.

“It was really D.K. and Chuck (Furuya) who decided to make our own fundraiser,” says Hawaii Foodbank president Dick Grimm, recalling when the NFL turned down their idea of the tasting event during Hawaii’s Pro Bowl. “We’re so grateful to them for advocating Great Chefs every year; it’s just amazing how far we’ve come.”

Pointing to the massive metal roll-up doors usually used for food shipments to and from the Foodbank warehouse, Lori Kaya explains this is where attendees will enter to get to the check-in area.

“It’s really a great location to have,” says Kaya, the Foodbank’s grants and communications manager. “Guests get to see the connection of what we do and how they are helping to contribute in feeding Hawaii’s hungry,”

Originally planned at Restaurant Row, Great Chefs moved to the Foodbank’s warehouse to better control the event’s environment. After the infamous 40 days and 40 nights of constant rain in 2006, the Foodbank decided to relocate.

“It sort of was a blessing in disguise,” says Kaya, remembering the night when guests ended up dancing the night away in the mud-soaked dance floor. “Now we’re able to have more control of the event, and have the chefs, volunteers and guests all come together under one roof to participate and have fun on this amazing night.”

As majority of the Foodbank funds come from individual donations and special events, Great Chefs has become a major contributor during the annual food drive campaign period of January 24 to April 20. Without the help of Great Chefs, the Foodbank would be in much greater need. Last year, the Foodbank had to purchase 3.4 million pounds of food, equating to 26 percent of its total food distribution. In contrast, five years ago they didn’t have to purchase any food at all.

“It’s such a great marriage of the Foodbank and these amazing chefs to collaborate and connect,” says Christine Matsuda Smith, Hawaii Foodbank’s special events manager. “With the generosity of these chefs and local businesses, Great Chefs has become a wonderful way of reaching new volunteers and continuing to educate people of our mission to help those in need.”

Although the list is still growing, restaurants who’ve agreed to participate again include 12th Ave Grill, 3660 On the Rise, Chef Chai at Pacifica Honolulu, d.k Steak House, Henry Loui’s, Hilton Hawaiian Village, Himalayan Kitchen, Hokulani Bake Shop, Roy’s, SALT Kitchen & Tasting Bar, Sansei Seafood Restaurant, Y. Hata and Young’s Market.

Along with Halekulani, Le Bistro, Taste Table and The Whole Ox Butcher & Deli, joining this year’s event for the first time is new country-style French cuisine restaurant, HASR Bistro.

Chef Rodney Uyehara, who has previously volunteered for Great Chefs as part of Moana’s Beachhouse, will make his first appearance as executive chef and co-owner of HASR Bistro.

“I think Hawai’i, being an island, we feel that much more of a responsibility to one another,” Uyehara says. “Although it’s been tough economically, for everyone, this night will remind people that we’re all one big ohana.” 10

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General admission is \$150, which includes all-you-can-eat and drink, live entertainment and luxurious silent auction donations. New this year is “The Cellar Door,” which gives guests a chance to purchase a key that will unlock the door to a selection of fine wines.

VIP tickets are available for \$200, and VIP tables of 10 cost \$2,500.

For more information, call 836-3600, ext. 244 or visit hawaiifoodbank.org.



PAST ATTENDEES, including Signe and Roger Godfrey, above, enjoy dishes from some of Hawaii's top chefs. Participating again in this year's event are Kevin Hanney of 12th Ave Grill, top left, and Chai Chaowsaree, below, of Chef Chai at Pacifica Honolulu. Peggy Anderson, left, helps serve food throughout the Foodbank warehouse.

