

## After tornadoes, it's local Chefs to the Rescue

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When devastation strikes, it is a time when rivalries are put aside. Such is the situation now in the state of Alabama.

The devastating tornados that struck north Alabama last month and wiped out homes and communities have united a state that come football season is notorious for being divided.

The support for Tuscaloosa and the northwest region that was hit has even crossed state lines.

Across the state, Auburn University wants to be a major contributor to helping those in need.

Hans van der Reijden, managing director of the Hotel at Auburn University, has been with the hotel for eight years. During that span he has participated in many fundraisers, but he has never seen one where every single item was donated. Now he has.

As requests for help went out, van der Reijden pondered what would be the best way to assist.

"We sent water, but wanted to do more," he said. "We can't leave our hotels and restaurants to go there and physically help out. So, we

realized the best thing we can do is hold a fundraiser."

The original plan was to pair dishes from five area chefs with wines for a benefit dinner. However, as word got out, the number of chefs wanting to be involved grew, and as of Wednesday, the number of participating chefs is up to 21 — and they are coming in from across the country. The number is expected to grow and all of those are paying their own expenses to be there.

"Every morsel of food, wine, linens, everything has been donated," he said. "It's about helping people in need, lending a helping hand and supporting each other."

The event — Chefs to the Rescue — will take place June 1 at the Hotel at Auburn University and Dixon Conference Center, beginning at 6 p.m. Plates with wine pairing are \$100 each.

A VIP ticket will buy the above, plus entry to the reception at 9 p.m. where you can mix and mingle with participating chefs. VIP tickets are \$1,000 each.

As of Wednesday, the Destin/South Walton area will be proudly represented at the event by three area chefs: Chefs Tim Creehan and Alan Baltazar of Cuvée Bistro, and Ken Duenas of Café Thirty-A.

Creehan serves on Auburn's hotel and restaurant management advisory board, and said he was the first chef outside Auburn to sign on. He believes there have already been between 400 to 600 people signed up for the dinner.

While Creehan is not an Alabama native, his partners at Cuvée Bistro are.

"I saw it as an opportunity to help," said Creehan.

Baltazar, Creehan's executive chef at Cuvee Bistro, will do the food preparation. They are preparing snapper over white beans with bacon arugula balsamic reduction and pickled jalapeño, which will be served with a buttery chardonnay.

Other participating chefs include Andrew Litherland and Miguel Figueroa of Ariccia Trattoria & Bar in the Hotel at Auburn University; Leonardo Maurelli of the Hotel at Auburn University; John Hamme, Maestro 2300, Auburn; David Bancroft, Amsterdam Cafe, Auburn; Graham Hage, Zazu Gastropub, Auburn; Rob McDaniel, SpringHouse, Alexander City, Ala.; Chris Hastings, Hot and Hot Fish Club, Birmingham; Michael Schwartz, Michael's Genuine Food & Drink, Miami; Julio Delgado, Ritz-Carlton Buckhead, Atlanta; Cameron Thompson, Two Urban Licks, Atlanta; James W. Mullaney, CEPC (certified executive pastry chef), Atlanta Foods International; and Kevin Sbraga, the 2010 Top Chef winner, Washington, D.C.

Each will create a dish that will be paired with wine or beer.

Check out the Chefs to the Rescue Facebook page or call Mike Clardy at 334-844-9996.

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