



JAMIE BOSTIAN, CEC

Executive Chef, The Pines at Davidson
Davidson, North Carolina

By Amelia Levin

Chef Jamie Bostian, CEC, had just started his new job as executive chef at The Pines At Davidson, an upscale retirement community in North Carolina, when the coronavirus pandemic hit. States all across the country began closing restaurants, bars and other retail outlets in an effort to contain the virus.

Like so many chefs in the industry, Chef Bostian had to quickly shift gears—pivoting from traditional foodservice prep and planning for a new restaurant and bar concept on the property to essentially becoming a food supplier and delivery service for the hundreds of seniors living on the grounds.

Now, instead of serving three meals a day in the dining room, he cooks up batches of food from a rotating menu and boxes it all up with his team members, who then drive the packages to doorsteps using the Pines' van normally reserved for human transport.

He didn't have to do all this. But, people who know Chef Bostian say this is exactly the kind of person he is.

"Tears came to my eyes when I talked to Chef Jamie and learned about what he was doing to make his residents so happy during these times and to help all the small businesses around him," says Chef Jay Ziobrowski, CEC, a longtime friend of Bostian's and president of ACF Chefs of Charlotte. "Jamie is a powerhouse of an ACF member as well as vice president of our chapter."

During my interview with Chef Bostian, he speaks very matter-of-factly with his native Carolina accent; he is certainly not patting himself on the back for the work he's

been doing lately. It's clear that he's just passionate about feeding others, especially seniors stuck in their home because of their high-risk status when it comes to developing complications from COVID-19.

"One thing sort of led to another," he says, noting the chain of events that led him and his team to start delivering hot meals for the residents' doorsteps. That was then followed by delivering ice cream from a local creamery, followed by delivering boxes of produce and meats from local farms, followed by donating leftover cooked food to a local food bank.

"The one thing our guests look forward to every day is the meal we

serve them, and especially now that they have nowhere to go,” says Chef Bostian. “Of course, we need food for survival, but that’s no fun and we believe food should be an experience, even if we can’t serve them in our dining room. Even though every day presents a new challenge, we are trying to make things as ‘normal’ as possible for our residents.”

Many of the roughly 400 residents are alumni or retired professors of nearby Davidson College. Of that group, about 320 residents are living in independent apartments, cottages and villas, and about 80 are in assisted living on the healthcare side. Chef Bostian’s team feeds both groups, but assisted living residents receive three hot meals a day as opposed to one.

Independent living residents place their meal orders the morning of delivery by taping their menus to the outside of their doors, which are then collected and processed by the culinary team for delivery to their doorstep later that day. The assisted living residents receive three meals per day served on trays to their rooms. Chef Bostian says his team has been going through 400 boxes a day, including various sizes of molded fiber boxes and between 300 and 400 soup containers—all of which are compostable and eco-friendly because that is important to the residents.



“We’ve been using this time when our dining rooms are closed to test new concepts and dishes because we basically have a captive audience,” says Chef Bostian. “Our volume really hasn’t changed like it has for many restaurants, even for those doing curbside, and we are blessed by that. I just thought, ‘why don’t we use our resources and power to help not just our residents, but also our community?’”

That thinking led, first to partnering with Two Scoops Creamery, a local ice cream shop in Mooresville, to offer a free scoop of ice cream every Friday. Now he offers pints-to-go so there’s no need to go to the grocery store. That got Chef Bostian thinking that maybe they should offer the residents more grocery items, so he reached out to local farms to bring in fresh fruits and vegetables that they box up and offer for \$25. “Based on availability, we try to give them fresh berries, apples, salad mix and other produce that they can enjoy without a lot of prep work,” he says.

Next came the idea to partner with a local farm to bring in ground beef and other products. “Most of their business was through restaurants, and they put out

a social media post that they needed to sell 1,000 pounds of ground beef a week to hit their numbers,” Chef Bostian says. “We have always focused on pushing more local product, so the partnership is a win-win.”



Chef Bostian also includes notes about the local products in the boxes to educate the residents. “It would be easy to buy product from the big guys but it’s really the smaller businesses that are hurting at this time, and we want to help them stay afloat.”

Most recently, Chef Bostian started buying spices from nearby Motown Spice for use in dishes, and he’s been talking to the owner about possibly developing smaller, retail sizes for inclusion in the grocery boxes. Each day, any extra food that his kitchen has leftover now goes to Feeding Charlotte, a local food bank, for distribution to local shelters and other sites for people and families in need. One week, Bostian’s team donated 50 pounds of food to the organization.

On the assisted living side, even though many of those meals are pre-determined based on special dietary requirements, Bostian has been using the local product when he can. One week, Howard Family Farm donated a bunch of Easter tulips in vases.

“It’s little acts of kindness like these that really make their day,” he says.

Chef Bostian works hard each day to ensure the safety of both his team and residents. “We do temperature checks every morning when our staff get in, and any new employee and even vendors entering the building must go through a health screening,” he says.

In the kitchen, Chef Bostian has set up prep stations so workers remain six-feet apart; maintains a rule of one-person-only for the elevators, and he and his team are constantly disinfecting surfaces and high-traffic areas. He also makes sure everyone is washing their hands regularly (and actually counting for 20 seconds), and he recently switched to a higher-grade sanitizer. In addition, alarms on the dishmachines further ensure proper temperatures.

Prior to joining The Pines, Bostian spent 11 years rising through the ranks



at the Peninsula Yacht Club on Lake Norman in Cornelius, ultimately landing the top-tier role as executive chef. A graduate of Johnson & Wales in Charleston, South Carolina (the school was moved to Charlotte during his last year), Chef Bostian worked at various restaurants and hotels as well as at a golf club throughout the region before ending up at the yacht club.



He believes his club background and CEC status helped him land the job at the cushy retirement community that is The Pines; the directors were looking to elevate the foodservice program to make it more on par with other high-end resorts catering to aging Baby Boomers who are enthusiastic about food and fine-dining. Chef Bostian was also recruited to help develop and implement a new bar and pub on the premises as part of a multi-million dollar renovation plan. Despite that COVID-19 put the pause button on much of our lives, Bostian's team is continuing to develop the new foodservice concepts with plans to open later this year.

"While we have many members of the Great Generation, the new generation of retired residents have different expectations and wants when it comes to food and dining," he says. "When I worked at a club or restaurant we would always gear up for a busy weekend, but here, every day is a weekend. We are also less affected



by weather. Working at a yacht club on a lake, if it was raining we were dead, but if it was sunny we were slammed."

On top of a nice work-life balance, Chef Bostian has enjoyed being of such service to his residents.

"I'm just very big on the thinking that if you take care of community, community will take care of you," he says. In these times, indeed, community is everything.