Meet our new Groundswell Cafe chef

Our regular volunteers have gotten to know Philip Hamilton over the last year and a half as our Volunteer Coordinator, however what many don’t know is that before joining the Matthew 25 team, Philip spent 10 years as a sous chef in New Orleans and North Carolina. He worked for chefs Justin Devillier and Nina Compton, both Best Chef recipients, and he has led kitchens focusing on French, Creole and Caribbean cuisine. Throughout his culinary career, Philip is very excited to take on the role of our Volunteer Coordinator, and he has led kitchens focusing on French, Creole and Caribbean cuisine. Throughout his culinary career, Philip spent 10 years as a sous chef in New Orleans and North Carolina. He worked for chefs Justin Devillier and Nina Compton, both Best Chef recipients, and he has led kitchens focusing on French, Creole and Caribbean cuisine. Through these experiences, he has learned and honed his culinary skills, and he is excited to bring these diverse experiences to Groundswell Cafe.

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Philip is also excited to continue teaching through the volunteer program at Groundswell Cafe, and classes planned for later in the year. Some of his immediate goals are to work on more specials, highlight farm produce and local purveyors, expand the catering menu, and of course build a vibrant volunteer program.

While we’re sad to see our former Groundswell Director, Aaron Amundson, move on after eight years of dedicated service to Matthew 25, we’re grateful to have someone like Philip already on our staff and ready to step into this unique role.

Groundswell Cafe is located next to the Matthew 25 office at 201 3rd Ave SW. Open hours are 7 a.m. - 2 p.m., Tuesday - Saturday.

Stay up to date by following us on social media!

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that are comparable to fast-food value meals. And the pay-it-forward section of the store offers free produce and other products to anyone in need.

So, is this a religious experience? In the 1800’s, people of faith started churches, schools, hospitals and other institutions to live out their faith and improve communities all across the country. In 2022, we have neighborhoods that have lost many of their institutions. Businesses are growing in scale and efficiency, often moving out of core neighborhoods and into places with more wealth and resources. Revitalization and rebuilding is needed. When I look at the Cultivate Hope Corner Store, I can’t help but think the Spirit is moving. Renewal is happening. And all of us are fortunate enough to have a front row seat.

Introducing the Cultivate Hope Corner Store!

Grand Opening
Matthew 25 celebrated the Grand Opening of our new Cultivate Hope Corner Store on Wednesday, April 27. The day began with an 8:00 a.m. ribbon cutting, which included remarks from Cedar Rapids mayor Tiffany O’Donnell and others. There was a Matthew 25 hospitality table at the store all day with volunteers giving out coupons, stickers, and more. We had a constant stream of customers and received a lot of positive feedback. The day culminated with a well-attended Grand Opening Block Party from 4:00-7:00 p.m., which included music, kids’ activities, pulled pork sandwiches and other samples of food from the store. We also received some nice media coverage, which you can check out at hub25.org/news.

About the store
Our goal is to make this grocery store a vibrant space that brings neighbors together and provides a convenient location for healthy food that’s accessible to all. It offers typical grocery items, including fresh produce, meat, dairy, frozen foods and dry goods, and it includes a mix of organic, conventional and local products. Some of our local suppliers include Amana Colonies Bakery and Cafe, Dan and Debbie’s Creamery, Pasta of the Prairie, Midwest Mushrooms, Cedar Ridge Winery, Lubben Vineyards & Wines, and Glyn Mawr Winery.

Improving access to healthy food
The Time Check neighborhood has been designated as a food desert, which means residents have limited access to affordable and nutritious food. Through the Cultivate Hope Corner Store, we aim to increase access to healthy food for a wide spectrum of people by addressing obstacles and providing new pathways to healthy eating.

The first pathway is convenience. By opening the store right in the neighborhood and at the intersection of two major roads, residents have a convenient, walkable location where they can purchase healthy food. To help make healthy eating as easy as possible, the store offers fresh prepared meals at low prices (around $4 each). These delicious meals have been developed by Groundswell Cafe’s chef and include a variety of options, such as Beef Kabab with Curried Cauliflower and Rice Pilaf, or Spicy Pork Bowl with Rice, Corn and Kale. The store also has fresh Groundswell Cafe soup and salads for a quick lunch-on-the-go, as well as $6 rotisserie chickens.

The second pathway is affordability. Often, the healthier food in a grocery store is too expensive for people at lower income levels, so we aim to keep prices below usual grocery prices. To help people stretch their grocery budgets, we have a section of free produce that is available for anyone to take, which is partially supported by pay-it-forward donations. We also accept EBT/SNAP and WIC, making it easy for families utilizing these programs to access healthy food from our store.

The third pathway is knowledge. Education is a key component of the store, with a small seating area where educational workshops covering a variety of topics will be held. There will be tasty seasonal recipes and other materials available for customers to take with them, as well as a bulletin board to connect people with more community resources.

Community building
At Matthew 25, we believe healthy food is a cornerstone of building healthy neighborhoods, and we understand the connection between healthy neighborhoods and increased opportunities for residents.

The Time Check and NW Neighborhoods have a long history of being a hard-working, tight knit community. At one point there were small businesses, including places to buy groceries, all up and down Ellis Blvd., which became a place where people would meet up and build a community together. What this boulevard had 100 years ago is part of what we’re striving to redevelop here: small businesses, neighborhood cohesion, a safe place where you can live, work and play.

In many ways, we’re standing at the intersection of change for this neighborhood. Soon, there will be a connection made between 6th St. and Ellis Blvd. There will be bike trails, flood protection and redevelopment. The Cultivate Hope Corner Store is really one in a series of great things happening in an area of town that was hit so hard by the flood of 2008. It is a grocery store for all, a place where neighbors can gather.

Thank you to our Healthy Neighborhoods Campaign donors!

Just one year ago, we kicked off our Healthy Neighborhoods Campaign to raise money for the new Cultivate Hope Corner Store as well as building new homes on vacant lots and the renovation of some affordable housing units in the Time Check neighborhood. As always, the community responded. More than 225 corporations, faith communities, foundations and individuals have contributed. Today, we are within $2,000 of meeting our goal!

Matthew 25 is so appreciative of the broad community support this project has received. Below is a list of our top campaign donors. Thank you to these and every one of our 225 donors for believing in our mission and providing such generous support.

$100,000 and higher
Argon Transamerica Foundation
Anonymous
The Hall-Witree Foundation
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$50,000 - $99,999
Alliant Energy Foundation
Barry and Gilda Boyer
Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust Co.
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Frontier Co-op Giving Fund*
GreenState Credit Union
David Maier and Matthew McGrane
UFG Insurance

$25,000 - $49,999
CRST International Donor-Advised Fund*
Leonard and Marlene Hadley
New Leader Manufacturing

*$of the Greater Cedar Rapids Community Foundation