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Hope & Main expands to 100 Westminster St.

November 11, 2022 - Rhode Island



Shown (from left) are: Barbara Papitto, founder, Papitto Opportunity Connection, Joseph Paolino, Jr., managing partner, Paolino Properties, and Lisa Raiola, president/founder, Hope & Main.

Providence, RI Hope & Main, a food business incubator, is planning a new chapter that many have hoped for—a greater presence in the city.

The incubator's founder and president, Lisa Raiola, said that, in early 2023, Hope & Main will debut its Downtown Makers Marketplace. This new urban eatery and local market will occupy the ground floor of Paolino Properties' 100 Westminster St. office building, adjacent to the Beatrice Hotel and the Superman Building in the Financial District. Open for breakfast and lunch, the Downtown Makers Marketplace, will offer hand-crafted and locally sourced made-to-order items, grab-and-go hot and cold foods, corporate catering, plus a curated selection of Hope & Main members' products and prepared foods. It will also feature a coffee, tea and craft beverage bar anchored by Schasteâ, a Providence tearoom that is also a Hope & Main member business.

The Downtown Makers Marketplace is designed to highlight Hope & Main's culinary creators. As part of an innovative incubation program to test drive new food ideas, Hope & Main entrepreneurs will prepare and sample items representative of their business concepts and unique food heritage ranging from places like Ethiopia and Trinidad, to Israel and Mexico, to Cambodia and the Philippines.

Raiola said, "The Hope & Main Downtown Makers Marketplace is a place dedicated to showcasing the enormous talent of our emerging and iconic member businesses. We have launched more than 450 food businesses in nine years. This project is about giving our diverse community of food-preneurs access to markets and consumers they could not otherwise reach. It is very costly for new brands to find their way to grocery store shelves or onto menus of established restaurants, and that makes it challenging for them to scale. We know how good these products are and can't wait to accelerate the success of these makers."

The 100 Westminster St. venue will support what's new in local food and will create opportunities to explore the foodways of many cultures that increasingly define Rhode Island's signature culinary landscape.

The fact that 40% of Hope & Main's entrepreneurs are founders of color is what attracted the Papitto Opportunity Connection to invest in the nonprofit's mission. From the moment Barbara Papitto stepped into the kitchens in Warren she understood how the incubator's affordable and accessible shared use space is transforming what is possible for entrepreneurs of color.

She said, "I walked out of there with armloads of products and food that I knew I wanted to share with more Rhode Islanders. The Papitto Opportunity Connection believes that the ability to launch a sustainable food business is a vital path to economic mobility, particularly for immigrants and refugees, because it is familiar and feels attainable. We want to support these entrepreneurs to make their dreams a reality. Hope & Main lowers the barriers to this complicated journey, and the Downtown Makers Marketplace will offer another innovative channel to promote these small businesses and help them to grow and thrive. We are proud to support this project."

Over the past two years, Hope & Main has felt the pull of increasing demand for kitchen time from aspiring food-preneurs. Raiola said, "Post-pandemic we've seen a surge of folks leaving traditional food service jobs seeking to create their own food businesses. About half of all these inquiries are coming from the Greater Providence area, and many are from members of historically underserved communities. We want to meet these entrepreneurs where they are, and that means building additional shared use kitchens in the city. We are currently in negotiation for a facility located in the West End of the city where we can equip three new shared used kitchens as well as build out kitchens for Hope & Main graduates. The Providence kitchens, along with the Warren location, will be a feeder to the Downtown Makers Marketplace."

Joseph Paolino Jr., former mayor of Providence and owner of Paolino Properties, has been a key collaborator on the project from its inception, helping to convene the various partners, and ensuring that Hope & Main had both the financial and tangible resources needed to make it a reality. He says that he immediately recognized the potential for Hope & Main to attract a new audience downtown, between those who live and work in the city and the influx of visitors.

"The Downtown Makers Marketplace is a fresh idea that will engage workers and tourists alike in Rhode Island's food start-up culture," he said. "The opportunity to partner with Lisa Raiola, a true visionary in this space, and the Papitto Opportunity Connection on a concept that is 'more than a marketplace,' is a game-changer -- not just for our building but for the economic development of the downtown financial district. As people return to the office and travel resumes with gusto, people are seeking new amenities, healthy food options, and captivating experiences. Hope & Main Downtown Makers Marketplace accentuates our state's greatest assets: our ability to collaborate and create great food, while also serving the needs of our community. I couldn't be prouder of this endeavor."

Raiola said, "Since the day we opened our doors in Warren nine years ago, people have asked us two questions. Why doesn't Hope & Main have a market and why don't you have kitchens in Providence? Now, with the good help of the Papitto Opportunity Connection and Paolino Properties, we can check both boxes."