

5 Restaurants in Georgia Recognized For Giving Back to Communities

The Georgia Restaurant Association announced today its 2017 Restaurant Neighbor award state winners. These individuals and restaurant groups have demonstrated a dedicated commitment to serving their communities through outstanding charitable service and philanthropy and will advance to the national level to compete for the grand prize of \$10,000 to support their favorite charity or non-profit.

The Georgia Restaurant Neighbor Award winners are:

Ray Schoenbaum, Ray's on the River

Ray Schoenbaum, owner of Ray's Restaurants, LLC is dedicated to helping children and has supported the Fragile Kids Foundation each year since 1988. He hosts events at Ray's on the River to benefit the foundation, including Tastings Under the Tent and an annual breakfast with Santa. Tastings Under the Tent is a fundraiser that features incredible food by Ray's Restaurants paired with beverages. Additionally, Ray's on the River hosts an annual breakfast with Santa to benefit the Fragile Kids Foundation. The breakfast is fully staffed by Ray's team and they donate over 125 meals for the children.

John C. Metz, Sterling Spoon Hospitality

Sterling Hospitality has raised more than \$730k for Special Olympics Georgia since the inception of their partnership. Last year's golf tournament alone raised \$95k. Metz and Sterling Spoon are also actively involved with the Atlanta Community Food Bank through hosting fundraising events within their restaurants and also participating in community events such as the Hunger Run/Walk. They also participate in an annual dine-out event for Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Campaign, which aims to end childhood hunger in America.

Regynald Washington, Hojeij Branded Foods

In 2015, Washington gave a \$1 million endowment to the Cecil B. Day School of Hospitality Administration at Georgia State University's J. Mack Robinson College of Business. The Master's program is now named The Regynald G. Washington Master of Global Hospitality Management Program. His endowment will offer graduate student scholarships, allow for enhanced global experiences, and provide expanding teaching technologies. Since his donation, the Regynald G. Washington Master of global hospitality Program has been ranked #16 out of the 4,000 best masters & MBA programs worldwide by Eduniversal.

Van Jakes, Jake 22 Management

Van Jakes is involved in the Wheels of Dream Youth Foundation, which works with high school juniors and seniors to provide mentoring and educational opportunities. He has also developed a program that allows college students to come in for an eight-week internship opportunity, where they learn about business operations and marketing. Jakes recently started his own consulting business called My 5th Quarter, which offers business and franchise consulting to other former and current professional athletes that want to get into business and have something going after their playing careers end.

★ **Willy Bitter, Willy's Mexicana Grill**

Willy's Mexicana Grill has been an active sponsor of the Boys and Girls Club for several years. The partnership started with Willy's supporting their annual 'Salsa, Salsa' culinary challenge, where the kids from the club create salsa recipes using ingredients from their gardens. Willy's celebrated its 21th anniversary last year by raising \$21,000 in 21 days to continue supporting the Boys & Girls Club's Healthy Lifestyles Garden Program. In 2015, they raised \$20k in 20 days and in 2017 they plan to raise \$22k in 22 days.

From all state winners, three national Restaurant Neighbor Award winners are chosen by a panel of industry professionals and receive an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, D.C. in March 2017 where they are honored at a gala awards dinner during the National Restaurant Association's Public Affair Conference. Each national winner receives \$10,000 to support their charitable giving efforts. Developed 18 years ago, the program is sponsored by American Express.

Georgia had a national winner in 2015 with Unsukay Community of Businesses for their work with the Giving Kitchen, a nonprofit charity based in Atlanta, GA that provides emergency assistance to area restaurant workers facing an unanticipated hardship.

"The restaurant industry goes above and beyond, not just by serving guests as the table, but serving others in the community," says Karen Bremer, CEO of the Georgia Restaurant Association. "We're givers by nature and understand the importance of giving back. These restaurants deserve to be recognized for helping shape and strengthen their communities.

<http://www.restaurantinformer.com/2017/01/georgia-restaurants-give-back/>

