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Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association and DoorDash Announce Recipients of \$450,000 in Grants

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Richmond, Va. – April 9, 2021 – The Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association (VRLTA) is pleased to announce recipients of our 2021 DoorDash Restaurant Operator Relief Grant program. The initiative is part of DoorDash’s [Main Street Strong Pledge](#), which included a \$10M grant effort in select cities, counties, and states across the U.S. and Canada.

Grant criteria included businesses with no more than three locations with 50 or fewer employees and annual gross revenue of \$3 million or less for the location applied for, with a brick-and-mortar location, that experienced a reduction in revenue, financial stress, or disrupted operations from March 2020 through December 2020. Over 690 restaurants in Virginia applied for the grant.

VRLTA and DoorDash are awarding 128 grants of \$3,500 each to businesses across the Commonwealth of Virginia. In choosing the recipients, judges considered the impact of the pandemic and the ways the business has adapted, the personal story of the business owner(s), the role the organization plays in their community, and how the grant funds will be used. Priority was given to women-, veteran-, minority-, and disability-owned businesses as well as those which have not received significant pandemic-related financial support from federal, state, or local sources. Applicants did not have to be a DoorDash partner to be eligible.

Like the restaurant industry, our grant recipients are incredibly diverse. From fine dining to take out only to franchises, recipients represent the full range of restaurants. Cuisines served include everything from Korean to Soul Food, Italian to Russian, and Vegan to Indian. There are businesses focused on sandwiches, ice cream, baked goods, and coffee. These restaurateurs are building businesses and community, and they continue to give back in spite of the hardships they have faced over the past year. Many have adapted and pivoted to offer online ordering, take out, delivery, and outside dining, and they are looking forward to a better year in 2021.

Hear from a few grant recipients in [this short video](#), and you can learn more about some of our recipients on the following pages. *Note to media:* for more details on grant recipients in your area or more video interview footage, please contact Kristin Berrier at marketing@vrlta.org or Amy Hager at VRLTA@amyhagersolutions.com.

VRLTA and DoorDash are pleased to recognize these businesses and support their efforts during and post-pandemic. We congratulate the grant recipients and thank all those that applied.

The Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association is the unified voice of the restaurant, lodging, travel and hospitality suppliers associations. VRLTA creates value for members by promoting the legislative interests of the industry, networking, educational opportunities, and protecting free enterprise. For more information on the VRLTA, visit www.vrlta.org or call 800-552-2225.

DoorDash is a technology company that connects consumers with their favorite local and national businesses in more than 4,000 cities and all 50 states across the United States, Canada, and Australia. Founded in 2013, DoorDash enables local businesses to address consumers' expectations of ease and immediacy and thrive in today's convenience economy. By building the last-mile logistics infrastructure for local commerce, DoorDash is bringing communities closer, one doorstep at a time.

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Learn more about some of our grant recipients:

- **Alexandria:** **Zongmin Li** and her husband opened **Yunnan by Potomac Noodle House** in 2019 in Old Town Alexandria. As first-time restaurant owners, they've focused on offering authentic Yunnan food and supporting the community. During their first year in business, the restaurant received excellent reviews, including one in the Washington Post, and was chosen as one of Washingtonian's Best Cheap Eats. Even while struggling to survive the pandemic, they provided meals to medical staff at local hospitals and supported the Carpenter's Shelter, a nearby homeless shelter. The restaurant is renovating to provide safer indoor dining; funds will be used toward this as well as marketing.
- **Ashland:** The mission of **Canteen at Ashland Coffee and Tea** is "Eat Well. Do Good." and the restaurant begun by **Cate Hawks** certainly does a lot of good. Cate's vision was to take her experience in nonprofit and government leadership roles and bring it to the food industry with a social entrepreneurship model. Canteen is focused on making the town of Ashland a better place to live; they've done so by providing free meals, holding a Christmas dinner each of the past three years, raising \$10,000 to help children in foster and kinship care attend camp, and offering a "pay-it-forward" program to help neighbors in need with a free meal. During the pandemic, the restaurant has pivoted to offer pick up meals along with enhancing their outdoor space. With this grant, Canteen will create an insulated pick up pantry for to-go orders, catch up on some bills, and continue to offer more amenities outside.
- **Buchanan:** **The Witt Stop** in Buchanan is owned by **Spring and Chris Witt**, who returned to Chris' small hometown after he retired from the Marine Corps and decided to open the town's only restaurant at the time. The pandemic has resulted in changes such as new menu items, takeout and delivery, and catering services. The Witts also added murals to the building, one of which is featured on the Virginia Tourism LOVEworks map. Grant monies will be used to enhance their online ordering system and add more outdoor seating and other amenities.
- **Cape Charles:** **Jone Gittinger** has had an interest in Russia since she was a small girl, and her dream of opening a Russian Tea House came true with the opening of **Dacha Tea** in Cape Charles in 2016. The quiet and intimate setting offers a place to gather for Russian tea and authentic recipes, celebrate a special event, and learn more about Russian culture. Because much of her business was based on serving large groups, Jone has made some changes,

including switching to a reservations-only policy and offering a new “tea to go” service. Grant funds will go to operating costs, outfitting an outdoor seating area, and marketing.

- **Hampton: *Cherry O To Go*** offers southern, homestyle meals to the Hampton community. Owner **Stacey Cherry** says it is “like going to your mom’s or grandma’s house for dinner.” With funds from the grant, Stacey would like to add some tables to create an outside dining area, create an outdoor curbside menu, and put toward operating expenses.
- **Manassas: *Jirani Coffeehouse*** in Manassas was started by co-owners **Jesse Sousa and Ken Moorman** to be a place “where people from all backgrounds and beliefs would feel welcome coming together, sharing their experiences [and] talents, while enjoying an excellent cup of coffee [and food].” Jirani is Swahili for neighbor, and this business has lived up to its name with pre-pandemic youth-centered open mic nights and as a site for community meetings. Funds from the grant will be used to continue to ensure customers feel safe and welcome.
- **Norfolk: *Melissa Hidalgo*** opened ***aLatte Café*** to follow her passion for coffee and community. Her downtown Norfolk location offers coffee and food to the business community, students, and people attending events; with more people working and learning from home, the business has been significantly impacted. Melissa has adapted by starting delivery of whole bean coffee to the area and via mail and adding to the retail area to generate foot traffic. With funds from the grant, the business will look toward the future by building an outdoor seating area and obtaining an alcohol license.
- **Norfolk: *Chartreuse Bistro*** is an organic fine dining restaurant in downtown Norfolk. Owned by husband and wife team **Christopher Corrie and Karine Varga**, the restaurant supports local farms and organic and green practices. The restaurant has adapted during the pandemic, now offering takeout daily and temporarily turning the dining room into a wine shop. Most days, Chef Chris prepares remaining product into hot meals for Norfolk’s homeless, and they’ve donated hand warmers and socks to those in need. The grant monies will be used to catch up on bills.
- **Richmond: *Michelle Parrish*** opened ***Soul N’ Vinegar*** as a small neighborhood food shop offering diverse foods for diverse peoples. The business focuses on selling healthy, affordable, packaged meals for everyone in the Church Hill neighborhood of Richmond. Michelle builds up her neighborhood by hiring from the community, buying from other local small businesses, donating to community organizations, and catering for area nonprofits. Funds will be used to enhance marketing efforts, install curbside signage, and meet business needs.
- **Roanoke: *Wonju*** in Roanoke is the only Korean restaurant in the city and is owned by **Johnathan Jeong** and his family. The business has built a following by offering authentic and traditional Korean food and creating a unique dining experience. Pandemic challenges include having to close their dining room and working to adapt to online ordering, takeout, and delivery. Funds will be used for employee payroll, other business expenses, and promoting the business.

A snapshot of grant recipients:

Who are they?

- 87 are women-owned businesses
- 83 are minority-owned businesses
- 9 are veteran-owned small businesses
- 3 are disability-owned enterprises

Where are they?

- 29 are from Northern Virginia
- 29 are from Central Virginia
- 32 are from Hampton Roads
- 3 are from Eastern Virginia
- 6 are from Southside Virginia
- 9 are from Southwest Virginia
- 9 are from the Shenandoah Valley
- 11 are from West Central Virginia

How has the pandemic impacted them?

- 69% of recipients saw a 40%+ revenue decrease from March-December 2020
- 67% have received less than \$25,000 in other assistance during the pandemic