

# The Culinary Kitchen: A Community Helping a Community

Bailey Carreker

ATHENS, Ga. – As a vendor, Rashe Malcom has firsthand experience with the complicated rules that come with selling food to the public. Rashe’s Cuisine, a Jamaican to-go restaurant, has been a long-time seller of sorrel drinks. Malcom used to make these drinks, bottle them, and then sell them to customers. Malcom was taken aback when the Health Department told her that she did not have the right kitchen for producing pre-packaged items.

In addition to complicated rules and kitchen requirements, as a vendor at West Broad Farmers Market, Malcom realized, “During the winter time, there [are] no markets.” She noticed that other vendors felt the same way – there isn’t any commercial space for small businesses to sell goods. So, in January of 2019, Malcom created The Culinary Kitchen to give young businesses the chance to learn and grow. Since then, The Culinary Kitchen has created many opportunities through education, events and kitchen space, thus enabling three vendors to take their businesses full time.

The Culinary Kitchen is a nonprofit microenterprise program that strives to provide opportunities for small and local businesses, while promoting sustainable business practices. Malcom has high hopes for The Culinary Kitchen to become the first low-cost kitchen in Athens with an incubator space. Malcom draws upon her own experience to educate young businesses on a multitude of licensing and tax information through The Culinary Kitchen. “It’s because people recognize that there is now an organization out there that solely focuses on helping their needs,” says Malcom. “Now they have all these additional opportunities.”

Malcom explained the many hoops that a new business owner must jump through when starting out in the food industry. “People think it’s very simplistic,” says Malcom, “They don’t realize just how much goes on behind the scenes to make it happen.”

After obtaining a cottage food license, a vendor cannot directly sell to a restaurant unless they upgrade to a commercial license. In order to get a commercial license, vendors need access to a commissary kitchen. A commissary kitchen acts as a home base for a food truck. Vendors are able to pull up their trucks, prep, clean, and store items.

“When you’re discussing ideas of how to take the next step, a lot of vendors were not able to take the next step because they didn’t have the commercial space,” says Malcom. The Culinary Kitchen is still fundraising for that commercial kitchen space.

Malcom was born into a military family in Connecticut, but they moved around frequently. During her teenage years, Malcom would visit homes in the military community and cook for families, provide meals, and teach cooking lessons.

When she was just 17 years old, Malcom created Rashe’s Cuisine. Twenty-six years later, Rashe’s Cuisine has evolved into a fully-functioning business, offering cooking lessons, catering, and school meals.

Malcom has always had other jobs. She has worked in health care food services, emergency room patient services, environmental service, contracting, and quite a few others.

“For a while this [food] was more my side hustle,” says Malcom. “Then I took that full leap of faith.”

“If I have to choose between feeding my family and going to a class where they tell me how I may be able to help my business, I’m not going to that class,” says Malcom. “Until you’ve been in that position, it’s very difficult to understand someone’s drive.”

Jon Ramsden of Eno’s Baked sells a variety of goods from sweet blueberry pop-tarts to creamy peanut butter meltaways.

“The Culinary Kitchen has given me a chance to do something that has been in the back of my mind for many years,” says Ramsden. “I’m able to try various recipes out on the buying public...I’m getting real time feedback.”

The Culinary Kitchen has organized a number of events, including a Downtown Culinary Showcase outside of Athens City Hall, which meets every Tuesday from April 2 to October 29, from 4-7 p.m. Most farmers markets meet on Saturdays; having the showcase on Tuesdays is designed to provide more opportunities for vendors.

The Downtown Culinary Showcase is filled with positive, friendly people. Every vendor is eager to talk with guests and explain their products. Visitors walk through the tents, mingling. The showcase displays a wide range of products from the locally blended tea of MEplusTEA to the handmade jewelry of Absynia.



Adrienne Chappell, better known as Chalise, says, “Whatever Rashe’s doing, I’m there...she’s a whirlwind.” Chalise is a long-term friend of Rashe’s; her natural soaps and fragrances are featured in the Downtown Culinary Showcase.

The Culinary Kitchen is also teaming up with Jittery Joe’s for a food truck brunch fair, which takes place every Sunday from April 28 to December 15, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Barber Street.

Ramsden says, “What I have observed in Rashe is a tireless energy to succeed in her various endeavors.”

The Culinary Kitchen just hosted a comedy benefit show on April 15. The show didn't bring as many attendees as Malcom was hoping for, but she says she received nothing but positive feedback.

“People [were] laughing and bobbing their heads...moving to the music,” says Malcom. “It was supposed to feel like community, and we did that, so I still consider it a success.”

Vendor Rhonda Palmer, better known as Yaya, recalls a sentimental moment: “We were able to have a conversation with Rashe and say, ‘through this winter community market, Grands Designs is going full time.’ And with tears in her eyes...she hugged me...she embraced me with excitement.”

The husband-wife team of Grands Designs was the first vendor to go full time through The Culinary Kitchen.

“We did it with her basically rain or shine, in the cold, large crowds, small crowds, whatever it was – we were committed,” says Yaya. “The passion that she has created through the people...she loves us, and she wants to see us succeed.”



“God gave me this vision to do,” says Malcom. “I’m out here struggling like everyone else.”

Malcom describes her perfect day as not having to worry about money, taking her time shopping for food, and preparing a meal. “I would cook food and prepare a really long table of food and anybody who wanted to come and eat could eat,” she says. Through the Culinary Kitchen, Malcom is helping other small business owners recognize their dreams.