

Lexus Chefs Serve the Food of Life and Love

May 01, 2020

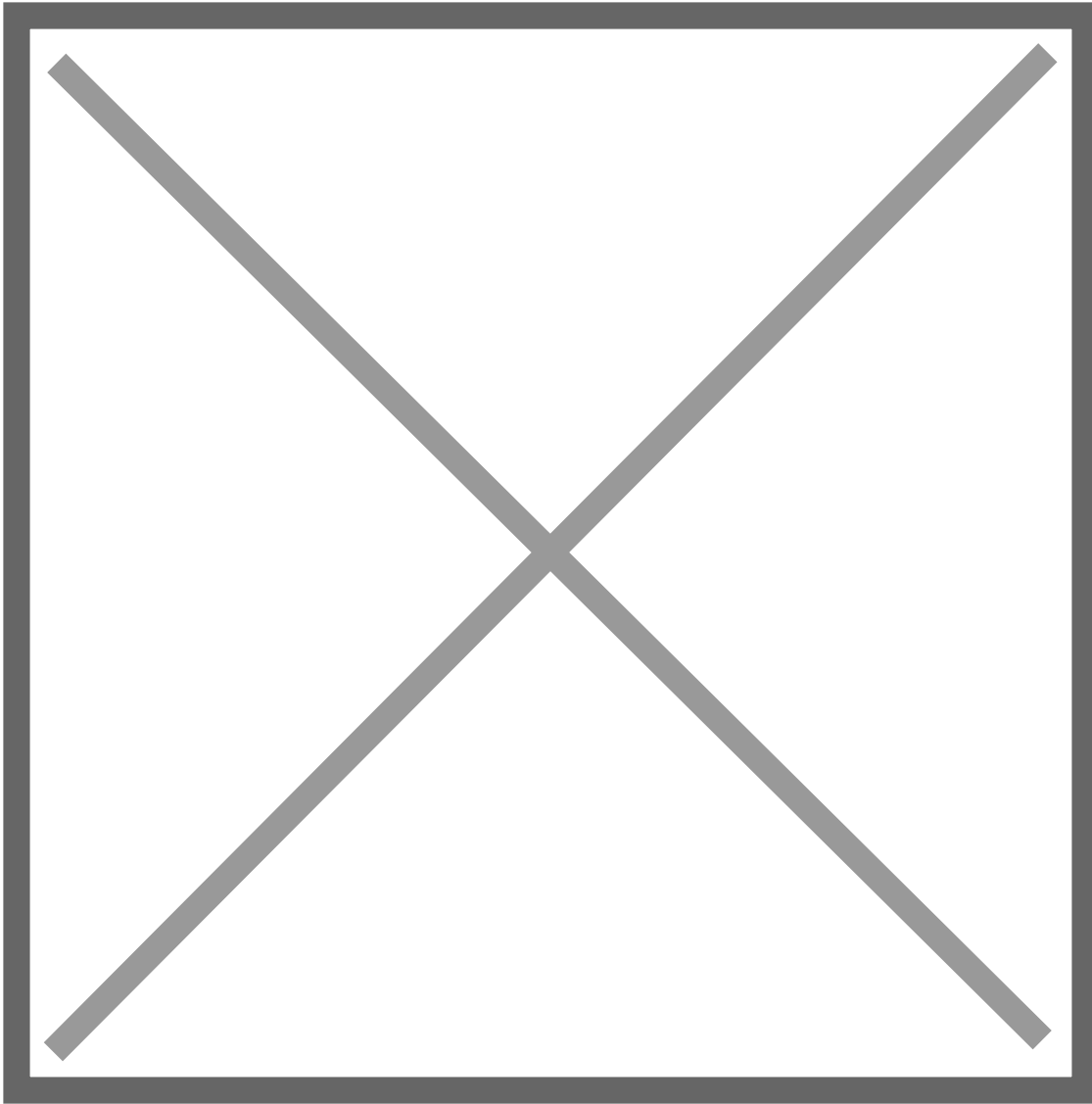
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Feeding people is what chefs do, and now is no different.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, restaurants were projected to contribute [nearly \\$900 billion](#) to the national GDP. With many businesses forced to shut down as populations shelter in place, restaurants have taken their own significant hit. Out of the staggering 701,000 total jobs lost in March, [roughly 60%](#) (or 417,000) were in the food service industry.

In an effort to help those who have been impacted, Lexus is joining forces with the Lexus Culinary Masters: a team of brand ambassadors who seek to craft amazing experiences through food. These Culinary Masters exemplify Lexus' core values: quality, innovation, prestige, luxury and performance.



Here is what these values can do when put into action:

Lexus has donated \$50,000 to each of their Lexus Culinary Masters in need. The chefs have full discretion over how they use the donations, which gives them the ability to address the most pressing needs in their own communities.

Here's a taste of how some of the Lexus Culinary Masters are meeting the crisis in their own kitchens—and back yards.

Delivering Meals to Medical Staff

Dominique Crenn, a Michelin-starred chef, heads up the prestigious Atelier Crenn in San Francisco. During her debut as a Lexus Culinary Master, she was featured in both “The First Ladies of Lexus: Dominique Crenn and Stephanie IZard” and “Pardon My French: Lexus Chef Table Lunch with Chef Daniel Boulud and Dominique Crenn” at the 2015 Pebble Beach Food and Wine festival.

When Crenn learned of the donation, she knew she wanted to give back to those on the front lines who are working tirelessly to combat the spread of the disease.

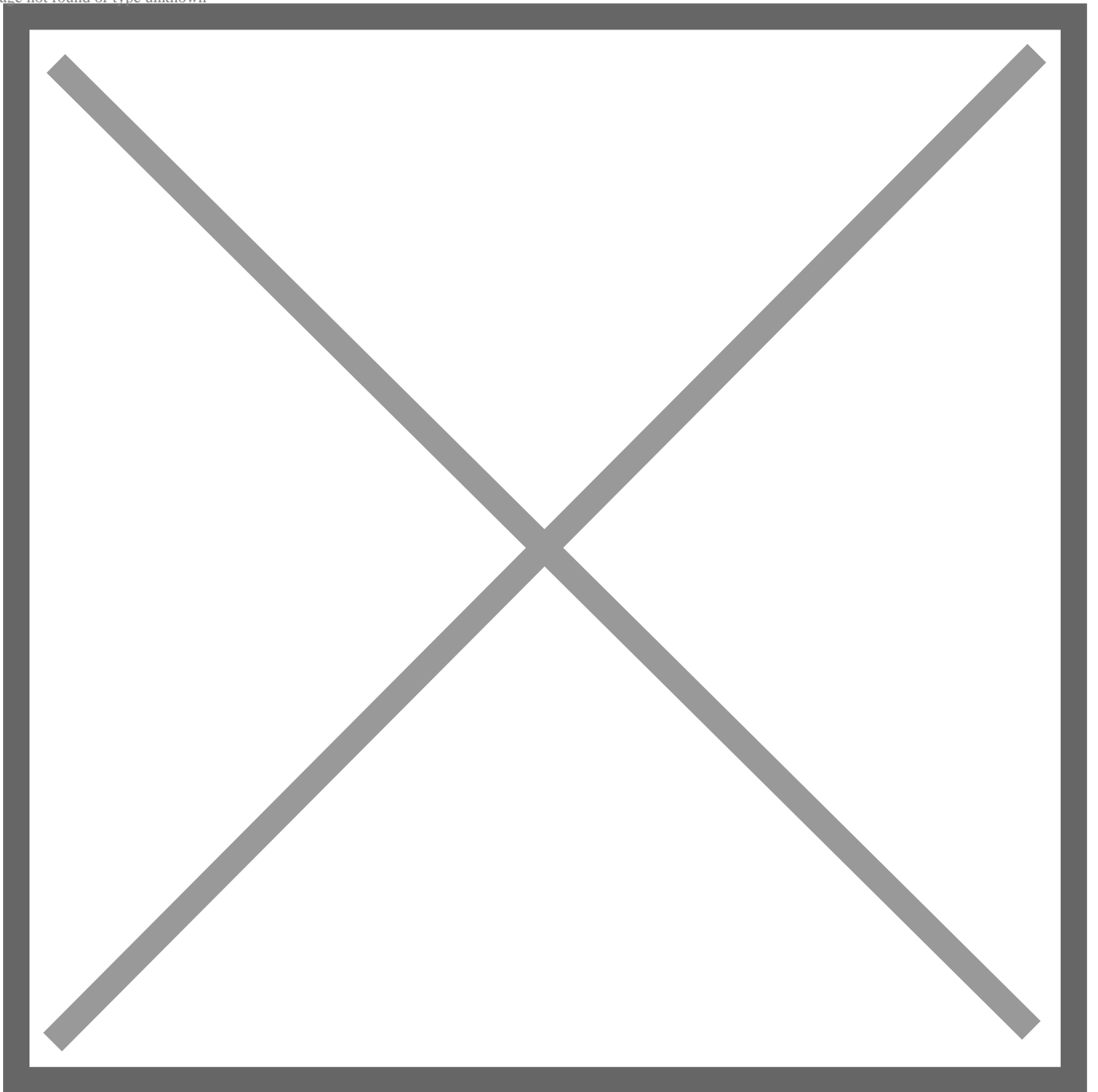
To achieve this, she will use the money to continue employing her team so that together, they can prepare meals and deliver them each week to the medical staff at UCSF Medical Center, focusing specifically on staffs of the intensive care unit, emergency room and cancer studies department.

Crenn is grateful and estimates her team will deliver approximately 220 meals each week.

“My heart is warmed,” Crenn says. “The medical community is going to love this.”

Making Meal Kits for Unemployed Workers

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Jon Shook and Vinny Dotolo are the co-owners and chefs of Animal, Son of a Gun, Jon & Vinny's Fairfax and Brentwood, Helen's Wines Fairfax and Brentwood, and their full-service catering company, Carmelized Productions. The duo is deeply woven into the culinary fabric of Los Angeles.

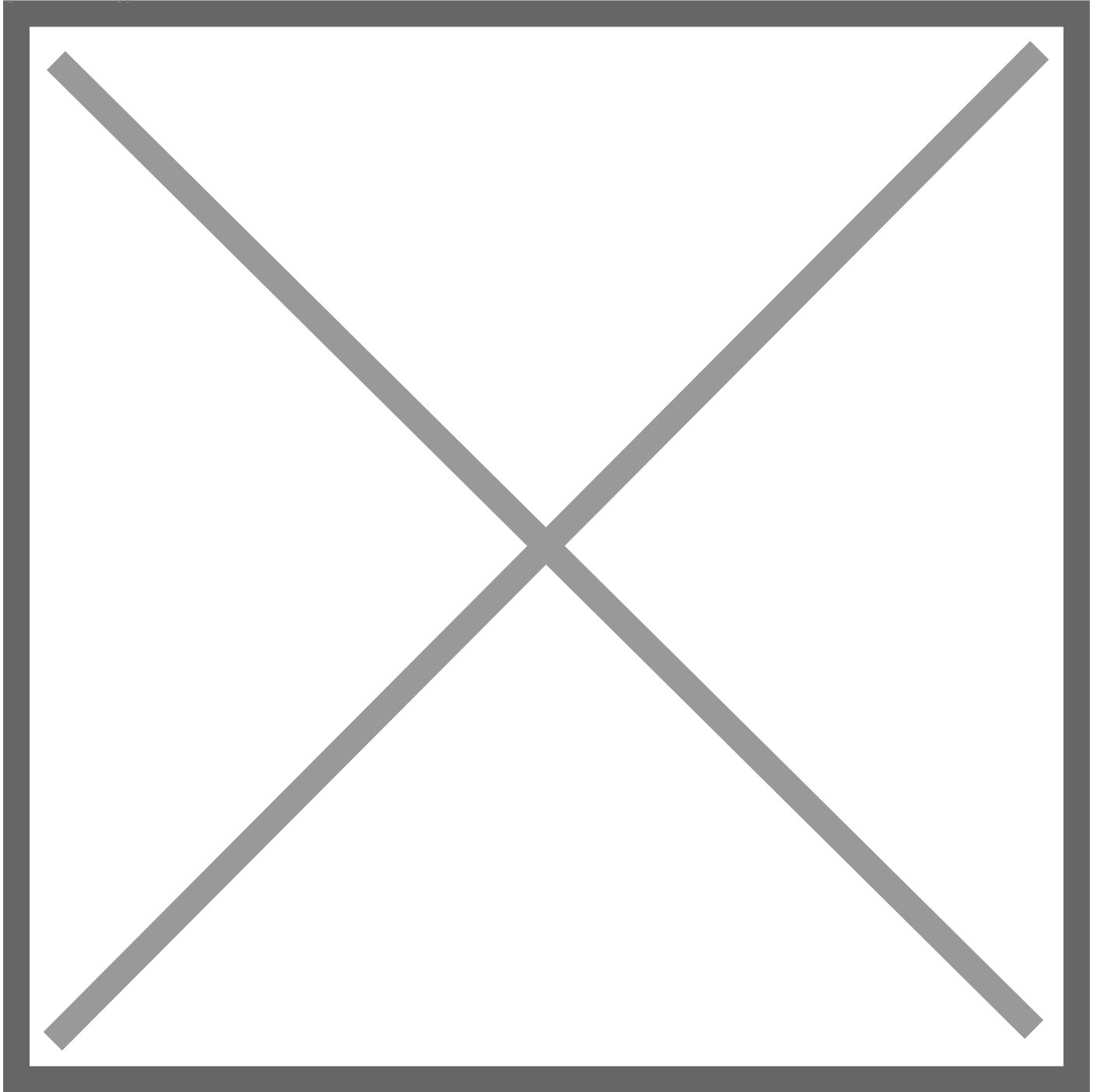
Coincidentally, their partnership with Lexus began when more than 100 diners gathered at Animal for "Cooking with Friends: Lexus Culinary Masters." The event benefitted Common Threads, a nonprofit organization that teaches children in underserved communities how to cook wholesome meals in a curriculum-based after-school program.

Upon finding out about their donation, John Shook was almost moved to tears.

“We can’t be more thankful. It’s more than anything we could ask for,” says Shook. “It’s unbelievably difficult in this industry as a whole. We don’t know how COVID-19 is going to affect the restaurant and the industry. It’s uncharted territory.”

Welcoming Back Staff

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Michelle Bernstein is a James Beard award-winning chef and the seventh to join the Lexus Culinary Masters. Born in Miami, Bernstein's cooking is critically acclaimed for its Latin-style flavors. However, her style is constantly evolving, infusing it with flavors from Mediterranean, French and Jewish traditions.

Bernstein first teamed up with Lexus back in 2012, when, as the first female chef in the program, she joined the stage with Dean Fearing and Daniel Boulud.

When Bernstein was told of the Lexus donation, she naturally thought of its critical role in helping her restaurant get back on its feet and stay there for the long term while providing meals to unemployed staff.

“When we reopen Cafe la Trova, we will have the funding to procure and purchase what we'll need to be more sustainable and will even be able to welcome back most of our staff,” she says. Returning restaurant employees to their jobs is one of the chief ways to help the local community long-term and build towards the future.

Other Culinary Masters are giving back with a wide range of initiatives:

Carlo Mirarchi:

The funds will largely be used to employ Chef Mirarchi's staff to prepare and deliver meals to medical staff at select hospitals in NYC. The hospitals include Woodhull Medical Center, Elmhurst Hospital and the Brooklyn Hospital Center. Approximately 20-70 meals will be provided during each delivery; plans are to kick off in the next 2-3 weeks.

Ludo Lefebvre:

A Michelin-starred, classically trained French chef who over the course of his career in America Chef Ludo Lefebvre has been deemed both “King of Pop-up” and one of the two leading forces for rekindling a national appetite for French cuisine.

Additional Restaurant Relief:

To respond to the difficult times created by the COVID-19 pandemic, Union Square Hospitality Group (USHG) created the HUGS Employee Relief Fund to align with the company's guiding principle of Enlightened Hospitality. In order to lend a helping hand, USHG HUGS created a non-profit 501(c)(3) fund to support team members facing unexpected financial needs and grants to help cover essential life needs.

Lexus donated \$50,000 to HUGS to support INTERSECT BY LEXUS team members and other USHG employees.