



**Welcome to the**



**Monday,  
January 19, 2026**

**Presented by**





# WELCOME!

Thank you for joining us at this year's West Michigan Food and Beverage Awards! Tonight, we're celebrating the movers, shakers, and plate-makers who keep West Michigan hospitality buzzing and deliciously unforgettable.

This year's event takes you on a full-service ride—from the first ticket fired to the final plate sent—highlighting the everyday hustle, heart, and humor our industry's best bring to the floor and the kitchen.





# TONIGHT'S SERVICE

## **FIRST COURSE: PRE-SHIFT**

Before the first ticket prints, the room is calm. Stations are set, aprons tied—the team takes a breath together. This course marks the quiet start—a small moment of intention before the night begins.

## **SECOND COURSE: IN THE WEEDS**

Service kicks into high gear. Tickets stack, voices sharpen, stations move in practiced sync. This course captures the organized chaos of the rush—fast, focused, alive with energy.

## **THIRD COURSE: SERVICE IN FULL SWING**

The line hits its rhythm. Timing, teamwork, and craft come together in perfect sync. This is the heartbeat of hospitality—where the work becomes art and the plate becomes the spotlight.

## **FINAL COURSE: CLOSING SHIFT**

The lights dim, burners cool, and aprons come off. Stories are shared, a shift drink is poured, and the night winds down. This final course is a tribute to the rituals that bring the team together after service.

*Pre-shift cocktails brought to you by Tito's Handmade Vodka, Maker's Mark and Patron. Hors d'oeuvres sponsored by Smithfield Foods and JW Marriott Grand Rapids. Special ingredients brought to you by GROWN Hydroponics, Great Lakes Tinned Fish, Pebble Creek Produce and Field and Fire.*

# MEET TONIGHT'S HOSTS



## Elliot Grandia

Anchor | FOX 17 Morning News

Elliot Grandia is a Rockford, MI native and three-time Emmy Award-winning journalist who anchors and reports for FOX 17 Morning News. A Michigan State University graduate, he began his career in Rockford, IL. After reporting on everything from a deadly tornado outbreak, massive chemical plant fire, regional manhunts, and more, Elliot was pleased to be returning home to report in West Michigan.

Outside of work, Elliot enjoys supporting his nieces and nephews, trying local restaurants, and staying active outdoors with running and hiking.

Janice Allen is an Emmy Award-winning journalist and anchor of FOX 17 Morning News (weekdays, 7-10 a.m.). She's also the face of FOX 17's "Pay it Forward" franchise, sharing positive West Michigan stories since 2011.

A Northern Illinois University graduate, Janice joined FOX 17 in 2010 after reporting in Indiana. Her work has earned recognition from multiple journalism organizations, and she currently serves on the board of Lori's Voice. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, true crime TV, and spending time with her daughter, Jolie.



## Janice Allen

Anchor | FOX 17 Morning News

# AWARD CATEGORIES & FINALISTS



## BAKERY OF THE YEAR

This award honors West Michigan's standout bakery—retail or commercial—that excels in craftsmanship, creativity, and consistency. From classic breads to innovative pastries, they elevate baked goods with quality ingredients, expert skill, and stunning presentation. Whether serving locals or supplying restaurants, they blend tradition with trend, setting the region's gold standard.

## CATERING EXPERIENCE OF THE YEAR

This award honors West Michigan's top catering team—whether full-service, food truck, boutique, or venue-based—that delivers exceptional food, flawless service, and unforgettable hospitality. Celebrating creativity, culinary skill, and seamless event execution, it spotlights those who elevate every occasion to extraordinary.

## LOCAL PRODUCER OF THE YEAR

This award honors a local producer—farm, artisan, or maker—who champions quality, sustainability, and community impact. From standout crops to crafted goods, they bring bold flavor, real nutrition, and a deep respect for the land.

## NEIGHBORHOOD BAR OF THE YEAR

This award honors an independent spot that captures the heart of a true local pub—welcoming, unpretentious, and full of warmth. With fair prices, a diverse drink list, and a laid-back vibe, it's where the community comes together to relax, enjoy live music, and feel right at home.

## FINALISTS

Lucy's  
Gaby's Gourmandise  
Sarkozy Bakery  
Nantucket  
Field and Fire

## FINALISTS

Red Bird Catering  
Martha's Catering  
Gilmore Catering  
Chevy & Sons  
Culinary Arts & Events  
at Frederik Meijer  
Garden

## FINALISTS

Patricia's Chocolate  
Evergreen Lane Farm & Creamery  
Deep Roots Produce  
Pebble Creek Produce  
Green Wagon Farms

## FINALISTS

Garage Bar  
Stan's Bar  
The Cove  
Tujax Tavern  
The Meanwhile

# AWARD CATEGORIES & FINALISTS



## GLOBAL CUISINE OF THE YEAR

This award honors a spot that delivers authentic flavors and immersive cultural vibes. From traditional dishes to themed décor and warm hospitality, they create a genuine, memorable dining journey that celebrates their roots. This award recognizes their dedication to preserving and sharing the rich heritage behind every bite.

## FINALISTS

Jaku Sushi  
Zeytin Turkish  
MDRD  
San Chez Bistro  
Mexo

## HEART OF THE HOUSE STAR

This award honors an exceptional back-of-house team member whose dedication, skill, and behind-the-scenes leadership keep operations thriving every day. Their impact is recognized by the peers who work alongside them. Recipients in this category are chosen through thoughtful essay nominations submitted by individuals who have witnessed firsthand their passion, professionalism, and unwavering commitment to excellence.

## AWARD WINNER

Ben “Kingsley” Eckert  
The Post Tavern

## BEYOND THE PLATE AWARD

This award celebrates food and beverage programs in our community that make a powerful impact far beyond the traditional restaurant scene. From school dining halls and hospital kitchens to nonprofits and community meal programs, it shines a spotlight on those who are too often overlooked. Winners are selected through thoughtful essay nominations from individuals recognizing their impact.

## AWARD WINNER

Revive and Thrive

## COFFEE SHOP OF THE YEAR

This award honors a local spot that lives and breathes coffee culture—serving top-tier brews, warm vibes, and standout service. It celebrates the artisans who turn every cup into a community-powered experience. This award is given to the establishment with the MOST nominations.

## FINALISTS

Madcap  
Lantern Coffee Bar & Lounge  
The Local Grind  
Water Street  
Morning Ritual Coffee Bar

# AWARD CATEGORIES & FINALISTS



## SERVER OF THE YEAR

The Server of the Year award honors the hospitality pros who go above and beyond to create unforgettable dining experiences. With passion, professionalism, and heart, they embody the true spirit of service. These individuals are the heartbeat of the dining room—elevating every meal with care and connection. This award is given to the Server with the MOST public nominations.

## OUTSTANDING SERVICE OF THE YEAR

The Outstanding Service of the Year award honors a team that delivers flawless hospitality—combining professionalism, expertise, and genuine connection to create a dining experience that's smooth, engaging, and unforgettable.

## COCKTAIL PROGRAM OF THE YEAR

The Cocktail Program of the Year award honors a standout establishment with inventive drinks, seasonal ingredients, and show-stopping technique. From bold cocktails to crafted zero-proof options, the winning program delivers flavor, flair, and exceptional service that sets it apart.

## BREWERY OF THE YEAR

The Brewery of the Year award honors a standout brewery known for top-tier beer, bold innovation, and unforgettable customer experiences. With a strong brand, creative spirit, and consistent quality, they set the standard and keep raising it. Their welcoming atmosphere and commitment to excellence make them a true industry leader.

## FINALISTS

Jerry Harroff  
Emma Sydor  
Liz Rumney  
Laila Brooke  
Brenna Puffer

## FINALISTS

Salt of the Earth  
Grove  
Four Roses  
Mangiamos  
Bowdie's Chophouse

## FINALISTS

Liquid Assets Cocktail & Wine Bar  
The Nightwatch Lounge  
The Cottage at Wicks  
Eastern Kille Wealthy  
Buffalo Traders

## FINALISTS

Founder's Brewery  
Bell's Brewery  
Odd Side Ales  
City Built Brewing Company  
Coopersville Brewing Co.

# AWARD CATEGORIES & FINALISTS



## DISTILLERY OF THE YEAR

This award honors a distillery that sets the bar with house-made spirits, bold innovation, and a clear brand identity. Beyond distilling, they deliver standout cocktails, top-notch hospitality, and a vibe that brings their spirit to life.

## MIXOLOGIST OF THE YEAR

The Mixologist of the Year award celebrates the bartender who leads with passion, creativity, and skill—crafting bold, unforgettable cocktails that elevate the local scene. Masters of flavor and showmanship, they push mixology's limits with fresh ingredients and innovative techniques that capture the spirit of the community.

## MANAGER OF THE YEAR

The Cocktail Program of the Year award honors a standout establishment with inventive drinks, seasonal ingredients, and show-stopping technique. From bold cocktails to crafted zero-proof options, the winning program delivers flavor, flair, and exceptional service that sets it apart.

## PASTRY CHEF OF THE YEAR

The Pastry Chef of the Year award honors a culinary artist whose creativity, skill, and passion elevate both sweet and savory pastries across West Michigan. From delicate desserts to bold, flaky creations, this chef redefines what pastry can be—pushing boundaries, dazzling the senses, and leaving a lasting mark on the local food scene.

## FINALISTS

Wonderland Distilling  
Mammoth Distillery  
Green Door Distilling  
Eastern Kille Distillery  
Load Road Distillery

## FINALISTS

Connor Guikema  
Erika Stob  
Rob Hanks  
Hannah Greer  
Justin Whitman

## FINALISTS

Sarah Andro  
Hailey Stevens  
Parker Bulliment  
Jonathan Elliot  
Jaslyn “Jas” Staten

## FINALISTS

Chef Gab Ducourtial  
Chef Sean Newhouse  
Chef Lisa Miller  
Chef Rawan Shatara  
Chef Charles Golczynski



# AWARD CATEGORIES & FINALISTS

## CHEF OF THE YEAR

This award celebrates a chef who embodies excellence — someone who delivers outstanding food, leads with integrity, mentors their team, and consistently pushes the culinary scene forward. This chef shines not only on the plate, but also behind the scenes by building a strong kitchen culture, supporting their staff, and engaging with the community. Whether through creativity, leadership, or a commitment to local and sustainable practices, this chef leaves a lasting impact on West Michigan's food landscape.

## FINALISTS

Chef Andy Krause  
Chef Alex Durocher  
Chef Chris Madsen  
Chef Mason Rice  
Chef Kelsey Winter- Troutwine

## RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

The Restaurant of the Year award honors a standout spot that nails exceptional food, top-notch hospitality, and a killer atmosphere. With creative menus—food and cocktails alike—and a prime location, they deliver a dining experience that keeps guests coming back. This award celebrates their commitment to excellence, innovation, and unforgettable guest satisfaction.

## FINALISTS

Butch's Dry Dock  
Rustica  
Gin Gin's  
Bowdie's Chophouse  
Nibi at Firekeeper's Casino

# LEGACY AWARD



## HONORING PAUL LEE

We are honored to present this year's Legacy Award to the late Paul Lee, owner and operator of All In Hospitality Group. A legacy is measured not only by success, but by the lasting impact one leaves on people, places, and community—and Paul Lee's imprint on Grand Rapids will not be forgotten.

Paul was one of the city's most influential and imaginative culinary minds: an innovator, a community builder, and a true visionary whose influence on West Michigan's food and beverage landscape will be felt for generations. Alongside his wife and business partner, Jessica Lee, Paul didn't just open restaurants—he transformed neighborhoods and redefined what hospitality, leadership, and community engagement could look like. Known for exceptional food, thoughtfully crafted cocktails made with fresh ingredients, and being, in a peer's words, "a whole hell of a lot of fun," Paul created spaces that brought people together. Iconic establishments such as The Winchester, Donkey Taqueria, and Hancock stand as enduring reflections of his creativity and passion.

Paul's legacy extends far beyond the walls of his restaurants. He invested his time, energy, and resources into the Wealthy Street neighborhoods and the broader Grand Rapids community—supporting local schools, feeding frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and throwing unforgettable Cinco de Mayo celebrations that quite literally brought the streets to life. Paul Lee showed up for his community with heart, generosity, and joy. His legacy lives on in the neighborhoods he helped shape, the people he inspired, and the vibrant spirit of hospitality he shared with us all.



# A SPECIAL THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE TIP JAR FOUNDATION

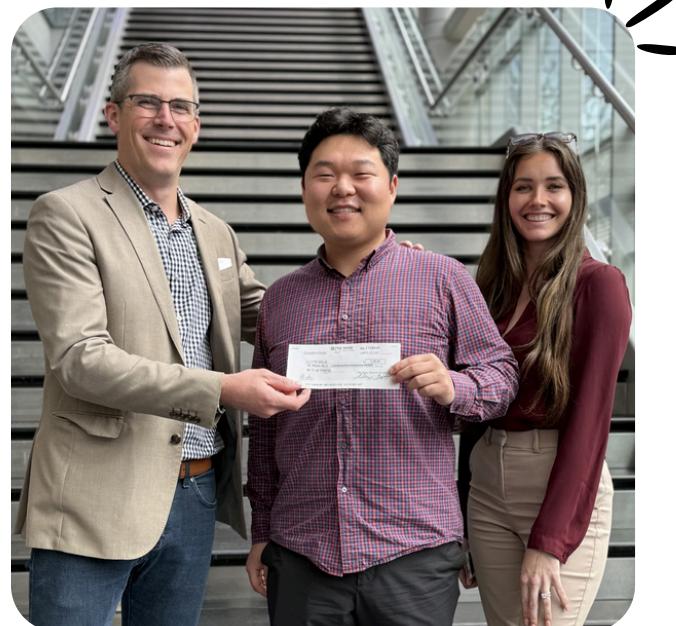
The West Michigan Food & Beverage Awards Ceremony is the Tip Jar Foundation's largest fundraiser each year, and it would not be possible without the generosity of our supporters. By supporting the ceremony, you are directly helping strengthen and grow the West Michigan hospitality community—thank you for being part of that impact.

## OUR MISSION

Our mission is to provide financial assistance to individuals in the food and beverage industry, including assistance for tuition and education. We believe that everyone in the industry deserves the opportunity to advance their skills and education, and that financial barriers should not prevent individuals from achieving their career goals. Through our events and initiatives, we aim to support the well-being of workers in the industry by providing access to education and training that can lead to career advancement and financial stability.

## A NOTE FROM OUR LATEST SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT: TIM LEE

"Receiving the Tip Jar Foundation scholarship meant more to me than I can fully express. Like many people in this industry, I didn't choose this path to get rich — I chose it because food feels like a calling. It's about the people, the craft, the moments when everything clicks, and the work feels meaningful. On a practical level, the scholarship helped me tremendously as a full-time student juggling multiple jobs. It allowed me to focus on my education, perform at a higher level, and ultimately pursue opportunities like studying and interning abroad. But beyond the financial support, it was the belief behind the award that mattered most. Knowing that the Tip Jar Foundation saw potential in me gave me confidence and reassurance that I was on the right path. It was a deeply meaningful milestone and a reminder that the hard work mattered. I'm incredibly grateful for the support, the connections, and the community that Tip Jar has created." - Tim Lee, 2025 Scholarship Recipient & Student at Secchia Institute for Culinary Education



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE TIP JAR FOUNDATION, VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT [HTTPS://TIPJARFOUNDATION.COM/](https://tipjarfoundation.com/)

# MEET THIS YEAR'S JUDGES



**Shawn Kohlhaas**  
Owner of Culinary Cultivations  
*Judging Committee Chair*



**Chef David Olson**  
Live Fire Republic | Ember Craft



**Chef George Dennis**  
Retired Culinary Director  
Kent Career Technical Center



**Chef Jeremy Paquin**  
Owner of Blueberry Haven



**Chef Sarah Waller**  
Associate Professor Secchia  
Institute for Culinary Education



**Michelle Dunaway**  
Host of Fox 17 Morning Mix



**Graci Harkema**  
Author of Rising



**Roger Chu**  
General Manager - Brick and Brine

# THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



## Title Sponsor



## Culinary Champion

**AHC** HOSPITALITY

HOTELS + RESORTS + RESTAURANTS  
*a management company*

## Hospitality Hero



SPECIAL OCCASIONS  
EVENT RENTAL & DESIGN

**EVENT**  
**THEORY**



DESTINATION  
*Consultants*

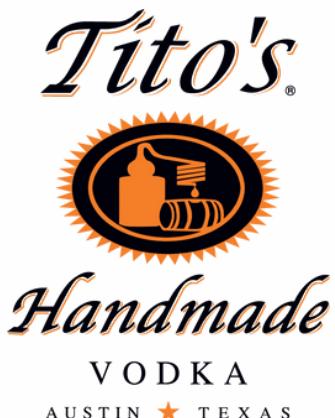
## Taste Maker



# THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

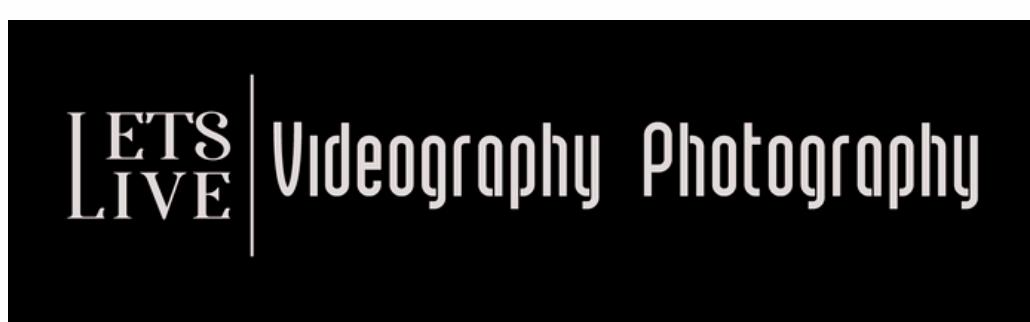
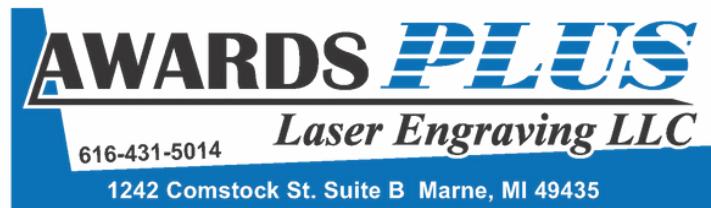


## Friend of FAB

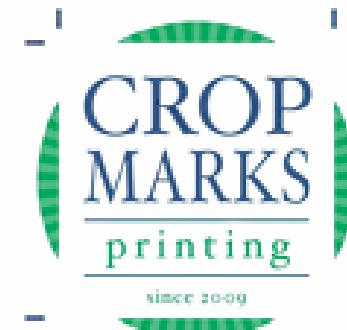


Smithfield.

Good food. Responsibly.®



## Community Partner





**Cheers to  
tonight's nominees  
and winners!**

Join us after the awards in the  
prefunction space for an  
afterglow to remember!

FOLLOW THE WEST MICHIGAN FOOD AND  
BEVERAGE AWARDS FOR INFORMATION  
ON NEXT YEAR'S CEREMONY AND  
NOMINATION PROCESS:

