



CORONAVIRUS

## Marcus Samuelsson's Red Rooster Miami Location Puts Opening on Hold to Feed Those in Need

The restaurant, which was slated to open this month, has debuted in a very different way

by Amber Love Bond | Apr 2, 2020, 9:00am EDT

Chef Marcus Samuelsson's highly-anticipated debut of **Red Rooster** in Miami's Overtown neighborhood isn't opening its doors this month the way it expected. Instead, Red Rooster Overtown is feeding those who are affected the most during the time of COVID-19 pandemic.

Samuelsson and his partners have teamed up with José Andrés' **World Central Kitchen** (WCK) and Food Rescue US - Miami to provide meals to anyone who is in need three days a week at his Miami outpost of Red Rooster. Food Rescue's founder, Ellen Bowen, who was in the process of collecting unused food from local hotels when they were closing their doors amid the COVID-19 outbreak, reached out to WCK with the idea of turned the not-yet-opened Overtown restaurant into a community kitchen — just like they had done with the New York location of **Red Rooster** in mid-March. Through social media, she was put into contact with the right people to make it happen.

Almost instantly, Bowen got a message from Derek Fleming, a partner at Red Rooster Overtown. "He said, 'Let's talk' and from there it seemed like everything just fell into place. We chatted on Friday, met with a team we were able to quickly assemble on Monday, and were ready to open the doors by Friday," says Bowen.

In a matter of days, the team was able to come up with a menu using donations from private donors and help from members local vendors and distributors who offered steep discounts, like Miami's own bread king, Zak the Baker, who offered the purchase of his breads for 50 percent off. The kitchen is overseen by Tristen Epps, Red Rooster Overtown's executive chef, and Karla Hoyos, chef de cuisine at South Beach's Bazaar by Jose Andres, and it offers a rotating menu.

"Right now, we're serving food that has been donated, which has mostly consisted of deli meat sandwiches. Down the line we are looking to pool our resources so that I can work with chef Tristen to create a special menu of 'Rooster-inspired' dishes for those in need," adds Samuelsson.

On the first day, visitors were given a choice of an Italian sandwich on sourdough, pasta salad with veggies, or a roasted cauliflower sandwich. Each meal comes brown bag-style with a bag of chips and a La Croix sparkling water, which came from 250 unused cases during this year's South Beach Wine and Food Festival.

"It's the giving of the community to the community. We're still maintaining social distance, but there's something about that small moment of human interaction that's just so special and invaluable at this time," says Bowen. "It's really great to have a chance to see a smile in person when someone grabs their lunch."

The kitchen is open every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from noon to 4 p.m. or until it runs out of food. On day one, 165 meals were served, and more than 500 meals on day two. The plan is to keep the kitchen open as long as possible with the goal of feeding anyone in need. Social distancing protocol is maintained — meals are placed on a table and those picking them up are asked to stand on marked spots six feet apart while in line.

Red Roosters second outpost in Overtown, which has always been an important part of the restaurant, plans to employ more than 100 members of the community. This initiative also gives them the chance to keep some of its staff employed during these times.

“Serving the communities where our restaurants are located is ingrained in the Red Rooster culture,” says Samuelsson. “In these unfortunate and uncertain times, I am so proud of my team; together we work tirelessly every day to try and make the days a bit brighter for those who have lost their livelihood due to the pandemic. As long as we have meals to serve, no one will be turned away.”