

IN THE NEWS

EPICENTER MT. PLEASANT

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by Courtney Jerome

Wood Shop Social is awarded 2023 Best Small Business at MCSB Gala

On Tuesday, May 2, Mt. Pleasant restaurant Wood Shop Social was awarded as one of the 2023 Michigan SBDC Best Small Businesses at the 19th annual Michigan Celebrates Small Business (MCSB) Gala for their positive impact. Eleven Michigan businesses were awarded with this designation, and Wood Shop Social joined the over 80 businesses awarded within various categories that evening, after 500 nominations were considered.

“The Michigan Celebrates Gala means more than giving out awards to small businesses—it’s coming together as a state to celebrate what success looks like through leadership, perseverance, and community,” said Lauren Snyder, vice president of customer experience for MCSB event sponsor, Consumers Energy.

The gala launched in 2005 and has become a recognizable Michigan awards program for small businesses. There have been over 1,000 companies honored at MCSB over the past 19 years. This year’s gala took place at the Breslin Center in East Lansing.

“Receiving the Best Small Business means a lot to us,” shares Wood Shop Social owner, Jim Wood. “It’s been an absolutely crazy year with blood, sweat and tears, and I’m stoked my team gets to see a result in their incredible efforts to get us to where we are right now.”

Tony Fox, regional director with the Michigan Small Business Development Center at Mid Michigan College, has had a front-row seat to that “crazy year” as the SBDC has been supporting Wood in the development of his business.

“Obtaining funding for a start of a restaurant is always challenging, and was even more difficult on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic,” explains Fox of Wood Shop Social’s journey. “Supply chain disruptions also created delays in obtaining equipment and fixtures during build out.”

“Jim Wood persevered,” Fox continues. “He is classically trained in French cuisine, which he adapts to New American offerings, primarily cooking with wood and fire. Jim is passionate about consistently delighting his restaurant’s patrons. Wood Shop Social brings a modern and high-quality culinary experience to the central Michigan area. Chef Jim remains humble and focused on serving up a memorable dining experience.”

It's a memorable experience Wood aims to achieve not only for his guests, but for his team.

"One of the things I enjoy is giving our employees a place to work where they can enjoy being at work and not dread coming in," shares Wood. "An opportunity to be treated with respect and fairness hasn't always been the norm in this industry, and that's what I set out to change."

"Coming up in this industry I saw how nasty owners and managers can sometimes be," he continues. "I said to myself, 'Why would I ever want to treat our staff the way I once was treated or the way I saw others be treated?' That concept seems crazy. 'Why take years from someone's life just so you can be a jerk or bully?' 'Should that make you feel good?' So, I decided to bring with me a like-minded individual to be the general manager who could help me make this happen. Her name is Una Ebert and I've never worked with someone as good as her. Period."

"Even though we haven't been open for a full year it's been pretty evident that we have left a solid impression," Wood explains. "I think what we're most proud of in terms of impact is giving the community a place to go where you actually enjoy yourself regardless of who you are with. Pushing the envelope and giving guests something they haven't experienced in the area has always been, and still is, our goal."

What's next for the restaurant as they approach one year in business at 2336 S. Mission Street?

"We like to shake things up as much as possible. We don't change our menu once or twice a year, but sometimes once or twice every week or so. Since we've opened, we've rotated over 20 different desserts. Our shareables are always being updated or changed," he adds.

"The future to us isn't months out—it's right now. We don't ever intend to go flat-footed and we intend to never be stale and always stay relevant. Do I have a plan or two up my sleeve? Sure. However, I want things to be a surprise. So, what's new? Come on in and see."