



Charleston Wine + Food  
*2025* Annual Report



Dear Friends,

What a year it's been. In FY2025, Charleston Wine + Food continued to grow far beyond our five-day festival, strengthening our role as a year-round champion for Charleston's diverse food + beverage community. What started two decades ago as a celebration of flavors has become something much bigger—a movement to support, connect, and sustain the people who make Charleston one of the most dynamic culinary destinations in the country.

This year was all about connection. We brought people together around tables and in kitchens, in classrooms and on docks, in fields and behind bars (the cocktail kind!). We expanded education programs, from scholarships and internships to hands-on microinternships, providing high school and college students real-world experience and a pathway into the industry. We invested in our talent, providing financial and logistical support that removed barriers to participation and amplified diverse voices—over 1,300 chefs, beverage professionals, restaurateurs, caterers, and artisans since we began this work. And we showed up for our community, from championing small businesses to rallying support for neighbors in need.

None of this happens without you. Every ticket purchased, every membership, every partnership forged, every volunteer hour, and every dollar donated fuels this mission. You are the reason we can continue to celebrate and strengthen the culinary + hospitality community we all love.

As we look ahead, 2026 will be a milestone year—our 20th anniversary—and we're dreaming big. With the launch of the CHSWF Culinary + Hospitality Foundation and our anniversary fundraising campaign, we're building the resources to ensure this community thrives for the next 20 years and beyond. We hope you'll join us in this next chapter.

Here's to the flavors, stories, and people that make Charleston home.

With gratitude and excitement,

**Alyssa Maute Smith**

Executive Director  
Charleston Wine + Food



# Our Mission + Purpose

## The Mission

The mission of Charleston Wine + Food is to celebrate the diverse food + beverage community of the greater Charleston area on a national stage and to create programs that build a sustainable, vibrant, and connected culinary + hospitality community.

## Purpose Pillars

### RECOGNITION

Spotlighting Charleston's culinary talent and hospitality leaders.

### SUSTAINABILITY

Championing environmental and community practices that ensure long-term industry health.

### PHILANTHROPY

Investing in initiatives and organizations that strengthen our local food + beverage ecosystem

### EDUCATION

Providing opportunities for skill development, mentorship, and community learning.



# FY2025 Highlights

26,475 guests.  
97 events.  
*Infinite connections.*

36.3%

*of guests from out of town*

*Talent from*

5 COUNTRIES  
+ 29 U.S. STATES

\$1,320.33

*Average Visitor Spend*

84.4%

*of guests visited the area  
specifically to attend CHSWF*

3.5 Nights

*Average Stay*



## 88¢ of Every Dollar Powers Our Mission

2025, nearly every dollar worked toward our purpose—celebrating the diverse food + beverage community of greater Charleston and building a sustainable, connected hospitality industry.

Over five unforgettable days, we generated **\$21.7M in economic impact**—bringing our **19-year total to \$210.7 M.**

*"I was a visiting chef this weekend...  
fell in love with Charleston.  
Beautiful city, nice people, spectacular food,  
fascinating history. Can't wait to come back."  
-Reddit*

## A Gathering Like No Other

From wine lovers to culinary travelers our audience came hungry for more than a meal— they came for experiences that can only happen here.

Over five days, guests explored 97 curated events across the Charleston area, each one a celebration of connection, creativity, and flavor.

*Every ticket purchased  
is an investment in  
Charleston's culinary story.*



# FY2025 Highlights



*3.89 billion media impressions put Charleston in the global spotlight.*

## A National Stage for Charleston

The festival's story reached far beyond the Lowcountry, with coverage in Forbes, SAVEUR, VinePair, and The Local Palate.

Online, our community grew to over **120K social followers**, and our website drew **more than 1.26M views from food lovers across the U.S.**

### *The Beating Heart of the Festival:*

## The Culinary Village

The Culinary Village buzzed with energy at its new home at The Citadel's Johnson Hagood Stadium, as guests explored chef demos, artisan goods, craft beverages, and unforgettable flavors.

From 20 vineyards pouring in the Corkyard to 18 spirits brands in Tippling Town, the Village was where flavors, makers, and music collided.

*11,868 attendees  
tasted over 115,000  
bites in three  
flavor-packed days.*

**89 CHEF DEMOS**

**80 SC-BASED EXHIBITORS**

**30 ARTISANS + VENDORS**



**Forbes** ★★  
TRAVEL GUIDE

"The four-day culinary event began in 2006... the festival is considered one of the top food and wine celebrations in the United States, and attracts chefs, food professionals and winemakers from across the country."

**SAVEUR**

"Every year, SAVEUR spends a long weekend co-hosting fun-filled food events at the Charleston Wine + Food Festival... Festival-goers basked in the sun and enjoyed wine and small bites served at the Culinary Village..."

*"Thousands took part in food  
and wine sampling,  
chef demos, and  
entertainment at Johnson  
Hagood Stadium."*

*— Live 5 News, 2025*

# Impact beyond the plate

At Charleston Wine + Food, our impact extends far past the table. We champion the people, businesses, and environment that make our community thrive. From reducing waste and rehabilitating our coastal waters to showcasing minority-owned businesses and promoting a local-first economy, every choice we make at Charleston Wine + Food is rooted in honoring and uplifting our home.



*Champions of  
local business with a  
focus on sustainability*

## A Focus on Sustainability

As a zero-waste festival, over 90% of our waste is diverted from landfills. We accomplish this through partnerships with vendors who provide robust sorting services, the use of compostable materials like Verterra, and guest education on responsible disposal. More than 14 tons of materials were recycled or composted, including 1,300 lbs of oyster shells returned to local waters to help sustain our coastal ecosystem.

## Powered by Volunteers

Our festival wouldn't be possible without the passion and dedication of our **306 volunteers**, who are often the first smiling faces and welcome that our guests experience. They bring the festival to life through warm hospitality, guest engagement, and behind-the-scenes support.

## Championing Local Businesses

We're committed to lifting up our local industry and using our platform to fuel the local economy. In 2025, **160 minority-owned businesses took center stage**, using the festival as a platform to showcase their products, connect with new audiences, and grow their presence in the culinary and hospitality community. We also directly hired local vendors to help bring our 5-day festival to life, ensuring the economic impact reaches far beyond our events. And because food and culture go hand-in-hand, we spotlighted 25 musicians and artists, weaving Charleston's vibrant arts culture into the fabric of our festival experience.

**90%**

*waste diversion rate  
from landfill*

**14+ TONS**

*of materials  
recycled or composted*

**1,300 lbs**

*of oyster shells  
returned to local waters*

**306**

*volunteers powering events*

**160**

*minority-owned  
businesses showcased*



# Investing in the Future

*From high school classrooms to college campuses, we're growing the next generation of culinary, hospitality, and communications leaders.*



CLICK OR SCAN TO VIEW  
OUR WORK IN ACTION

Education is the backbone of our mission to sustain Charleston's vibrant food + beverage community. This year, we expanded our impact with programs that open doors, build skills, and connect students directly to the industry.

By creating intentional pathways from high school to higher education and into the workforce, Charleston Wine + Food ensures the next generation has the skills, network, and support to succeed—keeping our industry vibrant for decades to come.



# Investing in the Future

## Culinary High School Scholars Enrichment Program

In 2025, Charleston Wine + Food expanded its impact by growing the Culinary High School Scholars Enrichment Program to a new school district, now serving students from both Charleston County School District (CCSD) and Dorchester District 2. Over the year, **1,100 students from nine local schools** engaged in hands-on learning experiences that went beyond the classroom, exploring careers in culinary arts, hospitality, and food entrepreneurship.

Students participated in **50 classroom visits led by 11 guest chefs and industry leaders**, including a corporate chef, culinary director of a hospitality group, executive chef, restaurateur, small business owner, pastry chef, cottage bakery owner/chef, food truck owner/chef, and Gullah catering company/chef. These sessions provided diverse perspectives and mentorship, giving scholars real-world insight into career paths across the culinary ecosystem.

During festival week, scholars logged **443 hours** working alongside industry professionals and had the unique opportunity to execute a Snack Shack in the Culinary Village each day, just like any festival chef. Students developed the menu, prepared food at volume, and served guests, gaining real-world experience in a high-pressure, public-facing environment while building confidence and practical skills.



4/5

More than four out of five scholars said their experience sparked greater interest in a career in food, beverage, or hospitality, with nearly half strongly affirming the impact.

95%

More than 95% of students felt their experience as a Culinary High School Scholar was highly valuable, with 61.9% rating it as extremely valuable and 33.3% as very valuable.

47%

47% plan to pursue a career in the field

In recognition of their hard work and potential, **45 scholars received a total of \$13,500 in scholarships** to the Culinary Institute of Charleston (CIC), supporting their journey from high school into professional culinary careers.

Since 2024, **71 students have been awarded CIC scholarships**, establishing a clear and tangible path from classroom to career and reinforcing Charleston Wine + Food's commitment to growing the region's future culinary leaders.

# Investing in the Future

## College Scholarships

Since 2008, Charleston Wine + Food has awarded **two annual scholarships** to College of Charleston students—one to a freshman beginning their academic journey in hospitality tourism management (renewable for 4 years) and one to a graduating senior preparing to launch their career.

In addition, we proudly support the next generation of culinary leaders through scholarships for students at Trident Technical College's Culinary Institute, helping them gain the skills and opportunities to excel in the industry. These scholarships help bridge the gap between education and the professional world, ensuring talent stays and thrives in Charleston.

## Internships + Micro-Internships

In 2025, our new College of Charleston School of Business spring break micro-internship program **hosted 10 students**, giving them concentrated, real-world experience during the festival. These students were embedded with our team and had the unique opportunity to interface directly with media, industry leaders, and top culinary talent while gaining invaluable, hands-on event experience.

**5 paid interns from the College of Charleston** worked alongside our team for nine months in areas from marketing to event production—one of whom was hired full-time by Charleston Wine + Food in June 2025 after completing their internship.



*"This experience has been incredibly rewarding... It's allowed me to apply my communication and marketing skills in a real-world setting while working with an established brand in the hospitality industry."*

*- Campbell Johnson*

# Investing in the Future

## Communications Capstone Partnership

Established in 2016, the College of Charleston's Strategic Communications Capstone program has become a cornerstone of Charleston Wine + Food's marketing and communications efforts.

Over the years, hundreds of students have participated, gaining hands-on experience in marketing, storytelling, and campaign execution for the organization. Job placement after this immersive experience is notably high, with many graduates moving directly into careers in communications, marketing, and public relations.



In 2025, a **talented team of 10 students** operated through the full-service, student-run COMM Agency—an immersive experience that blends classroom rigor with real-world impact. From the fall semester through festival week, students engaged deeply with our mission.

Students were embedded with the CHSWF team, interfacing directly with media, industry leaders, and top talent while gaining invaluable, hands-on event experience.

*This program continues to strengthen Charleston Wine + Food's marketing and communications impact, while providing students with practical experience that prepares them for professional success.*

*"One of the unique aspects of the COMM Agency experience is that students have the opportunity to sit in the strategy seat."*

*—Professor Amanda Ruth-McSwain*



# Supporting the Industry + Strengthening Community

*Investing in our talent and peers ensures Charleston's culinary and hospitality community thrives for years to come.*

By investing in professional development, honoring excellence, removing participation barriers, and providing financial and logistical support to local talent and businesses, Charleston Wine + Food strengthens the entire culinary ecosystem—ensuring that creativity, innovation, and sustainability continue to flourish in Charleston and beyond.

*"The experience alone was phenomenal. Our business was introduced to so much new clientele that would probably not get outside of Wine and Food. Overall meeting so many talented people and brands from around the country was refreshing. This has to be the best festival in Charleston hands down."*  
—2025 Talent Participant



## *talent support*

We supported and collaborated with festival talent through stipends and professional support valued at **\$350,000**, helping chefs, winemakers, and beverage experts focus on creating extraordinary experiences.

Since the inception of this program, CHSWF has supported over **1,300 talent participants**, providing the resources needed to showcase their work to an engaged national audience.

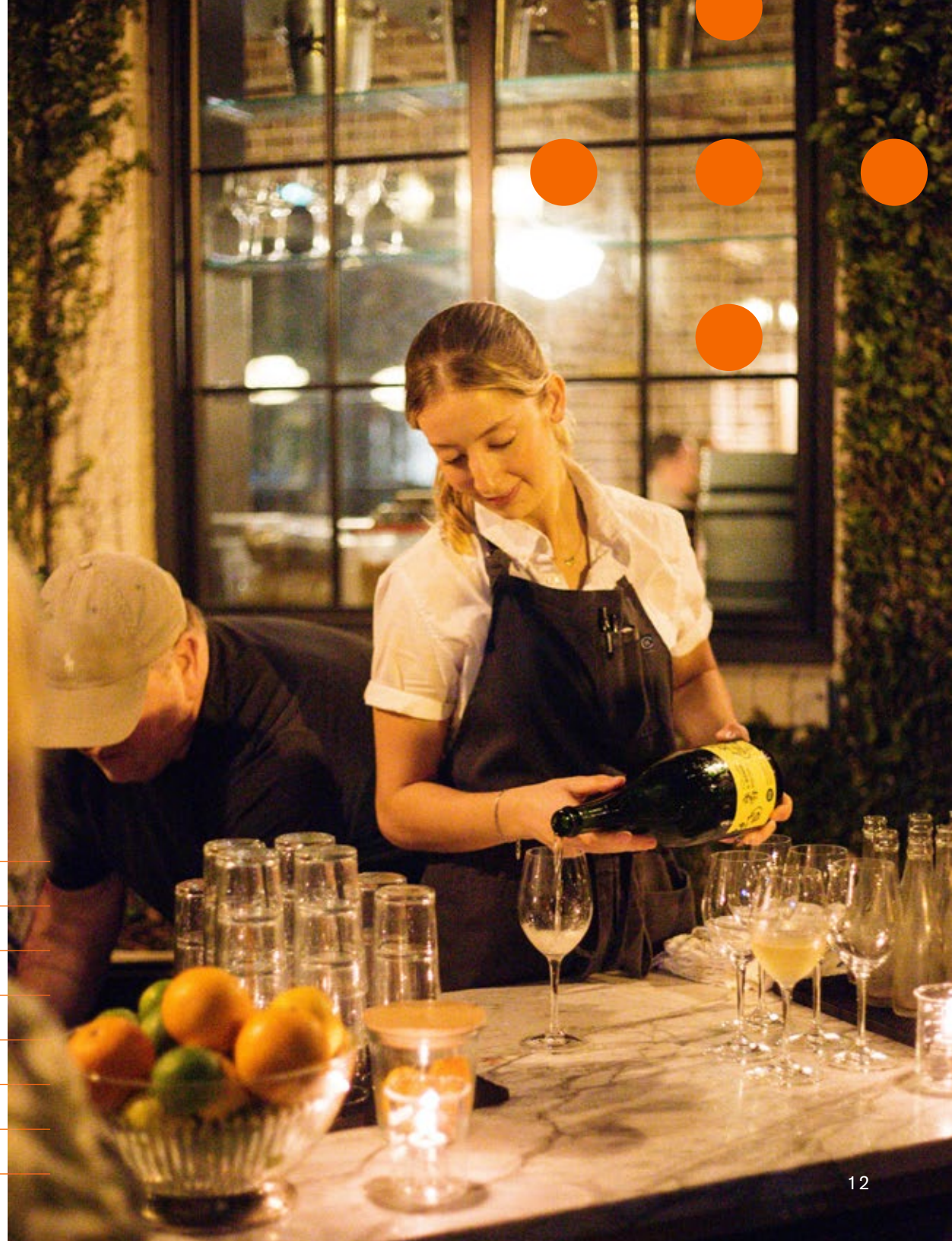
This investment reduces barriers to participation for members of the industry—particularly for underrepresented groups—and enables us to amplify diverse voices on a national stage.

# Industry Education + Collaboration

*CHSWF co-hosted a beverage workshop for industry professionals featuring Dave Arnold from Bar Contra.*

This event, produced in partnership with babas on meeting, served as continuing education for local bartenders and mixologists, reinforcing our commitment to year-round professional development.

babas	The Ordinary / FIG
Last Saint	Bar George
The OD	Bev Lab
Seahorse	Edmund's Oast
Sullivans Fish Camp	Leons
FIG	Highwire
By the Way	Le Farfalle
Sissy Bar	Winebow



# Community Impact Awards

*Each year, our Community Impact Awards honor local leaders who demonstrate outstanding artistry, generosity, and dedication to the culinary and hospitality community.*

In 2025, CHSWF, with **REV Federal Credit Union** as the Luncheon Presenter, recognized this year's awardees for their exceptional contributions to the region's culinary + hospitality community.

This year, high school students from Fort Dorchester were integrated into the event, providing a passed appetizer that showcased the Culinary High School Scholars program and highlighted the goals of our educational initiatives.

Their participation offered guests a tangible connection to the next generation of culinary talent, emphasizing the festival's commitment to education, mentorship, and community development.



*I was really moved by the stories and the purpose behind CHSWF. It's a long story, but suffice it to say I wish there was something like this available to me when I was in high school.*

*- Ken Malinowski*



# Supporting the Local Community

*In addition to talent and education support, CHSWF helped amplify community-driven initiatives, recognizing that our food + beverage community thrives when its people do.*

This year, we assisted Randi Weinstein with a GoFundMe campaign for Mark Mahefka and Abundant Seafood, providing both visibility and resources to support a beloved local business during a challenging time.

By rallying our network, we not only offered financial relief, but also reinforced the sense of connection, care, and resilience that defines Charleston's culinary + hospitality family.



# The Summer Sizzle Series

## *Celebrating Community, Culture, and Culinary Stories*

Charleston Wine + Food launched the Summer Sizzle series in 2024 to provide Charlestonians with opportunities to explore, celebrate, and preserve local culinary traditions.

In 2025, the series ran from May through July, offering a slate of events that blended hands-on learning, thought-provoking conversations, and community gatherings. These events strengthened the hospitality industry, highlighted the diversity of Charleston's food culture, and preserved the city's rich culinary history.



*Finding Edna Lewis  
Screening + Conversation: Deb Freeman*

Culinary historian, writer, and executive producer of the Emmy Award-winning PBS documentary *Finding Edna Lewis*, Deb Freeman joined Charleston award-winning chef and writer Amethyst Ganaway to lead a conversation rooted in Edna Lewis's contributions to Southern cooking in the Lowcountry.



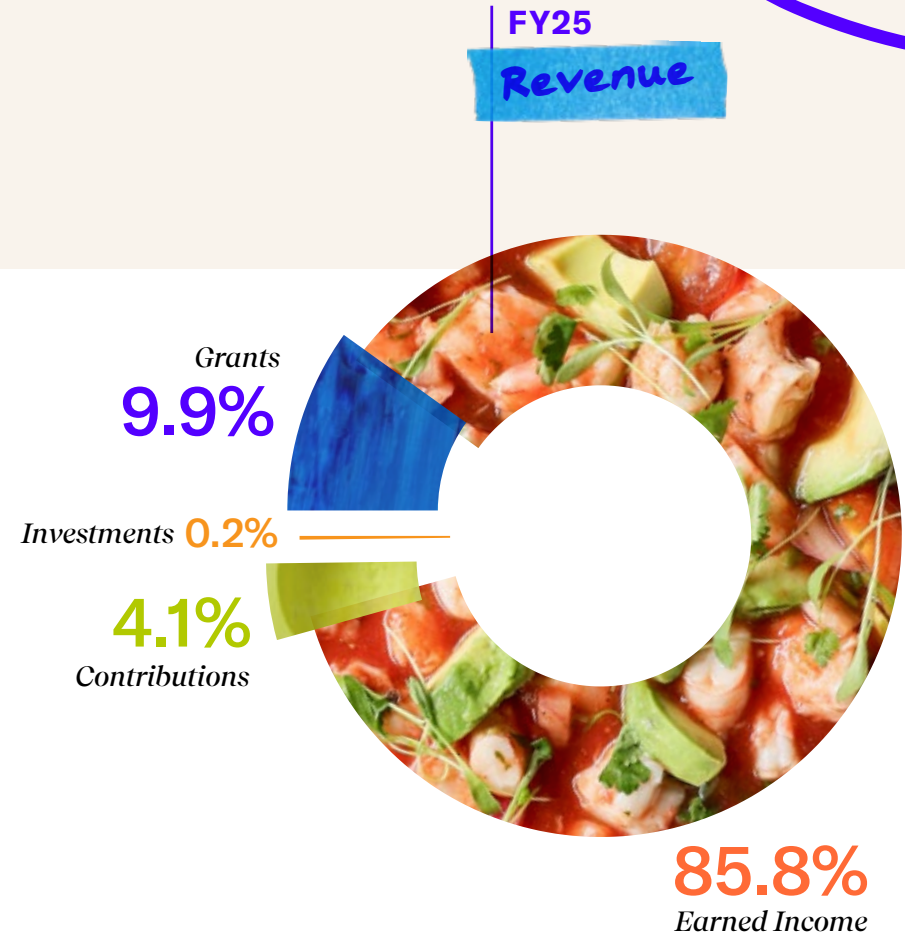
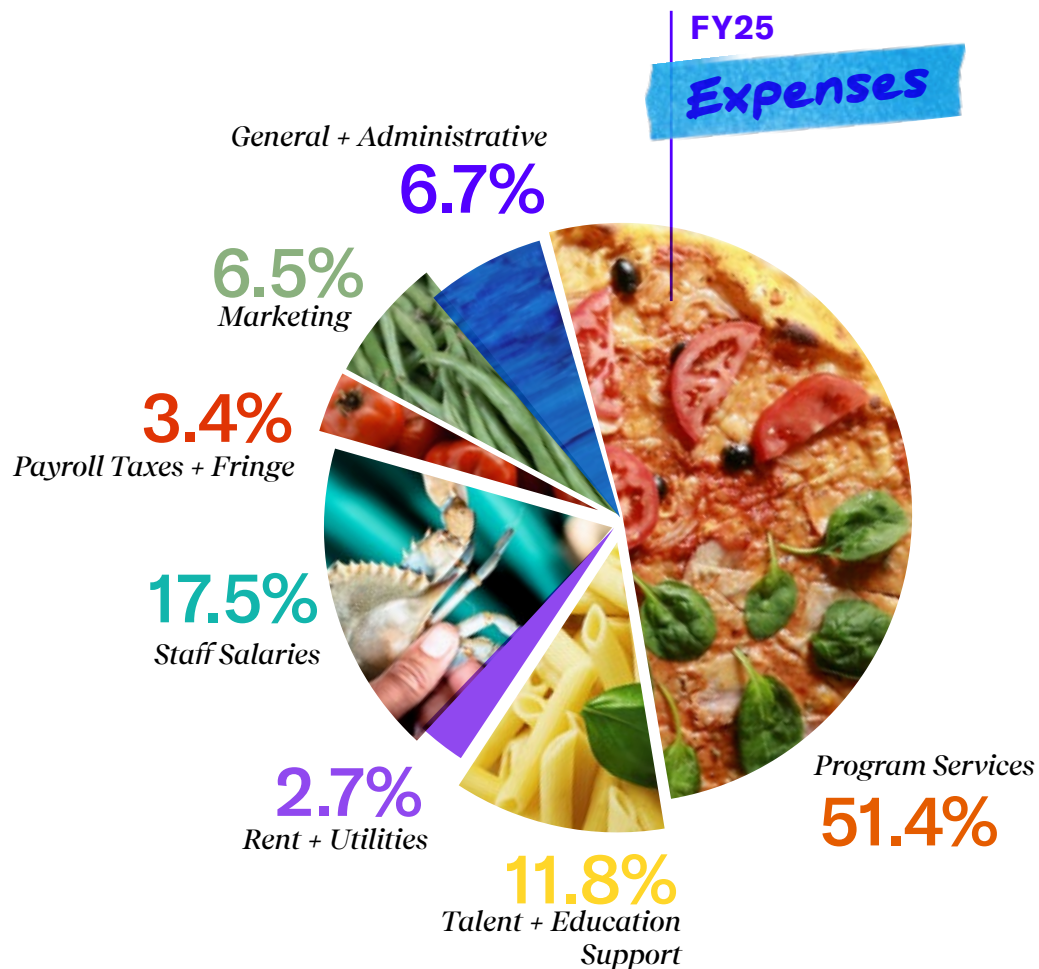
*We The Pizza: A Conversation  
with Muhammad Abdul-Hadi*

Abdul-Hadi is a 2024 James Beard Leadership Award recipient, and the founder of Down North Pizza, a mission-driven restaurant that exclusively hires formerly incarcerated individuals, shared insights from his cookbook and spoke about his vision for food as a platform for social impact.

*Through Summer Sizzle 2025, CHSWF successfully amplified and preserved Charleston's food stories, provided meaningful educational and cultural experiences, and connected community members across the city to the vibrant local culinary scene.*

# Fiscal Year at a Glance

*A financial snapshot of our 2025 revenues and expenses as shown in our love-language: food.*



# Looking Ahead



As we close the chapter on FY2025, we're already setting the table for a milestone year—our **20th anniversary festival** in 2026. Two decades of bringing people together around the table is worth celebrating, and we're planning programming and events that honor our roots while boldly embracing the future of Charleston's culinary + hospitality community.

The year ahead will also mark the public launch of our 20th Anniversary Fundraising Campaign, a pivotal effort to secure the resources needed to expand our educational programs, increase industry support, and deepen our year-round impact.

A major driver of this vision is the CHSWF Culinary + Hospitality Foundation, our new supporting nonprofit organization dedicated to building a sustainable, vibrant, and connected culinary + hospitality ecosystem. Through scholarships, internships, workforce development programs, and direct industry investment, the Foundation will extend our mission far beyond the festival grounds—ensuring Charleston remains a place where culinary creativity thrives for generations to come.

**In 2026, we won't just celebrate the past, we'll set the course for the next 20 years!**



# Acknowledgements

## BOARD 2025

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**Jennifer Murray, Chair**  
*First Horizon, Charleston Market President*

**Mamie Bush, Immediate Past Chair**  
*The Boeing Company,  
Corporate Events & Logistics / Site Lead*

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**Tommy Preston, Advisor**  
*The Boeing Company, Vice President,  
Global Talent, Development,  
& Employee Experience*

**Rick Widman, Chair Emeritus**  
*Charming Inns, Owner*

**In memory of Laura Hewitt, Chair  
Emerita**

**David Marconi, Board Member  
Emeritus**



# Acknowledgements

## FRIENDS OF THE FESTIVAL 2025

---

### *Top Chef*

Chase Bank  
Hoyt + Berenyi  
Hudson Automotive Group  
Lynsey and Michael Jones  
Marie Lord

### *Grand Cru*

Bill + Karyn Hewitt  
Charming Inns + Circa 1886  
Chip + Ginny Hoover  
Claudia + Timothy Bellars  
David + Christine Sthulmiller  
Dennis McGill + Tim Wilmott  
Don + Joanne Migliori  
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Fred + Toni Dering  
Green Door Co.  
Katy Chung + Peter Key  
Larry + Sarah Watts  
Maynard Nexsen  
Shumaker  
South State Bank  
Timothy + Jessica Canning  
United Bank

### *Five Star*

Aarati Alexander  
AMS Communications  
Andy Horwitz  
Candice + Ry Hudnall  
David Marconi  
Desire Vincent-Levy  
Elizabeth Baker  
Kacie Highsmith  
Mosmi Naik-Patel  
P. Gary Shank  
Tim Reynolds

### *Epicurean*

College of College Alumni Association  
Elaine Sherard  
Les Cavins  
Mai-Trinh Pham



# Acknowledgements

LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
PARTNERSHIPS

Berkeley County  
Charleston County  
Experience Mount Pleasant  
The City of Charleston  
The City of North Charleston

MEDIA  
PARTNERSHIPS

edible Manhattan  
Garden & Gun  
imbibe  
Live 5 News  
SAVEUR  
Southern Flavor Magazine  
The Local Palate  
The Post and Courier  
VinePair  
95SX

ACCOMMODATIONS  
PARTNERSHIPS

Cambria Hotel Charleston Riverview	Hotel Bella Grace	Springhill Suites Riverview
Charleston Place	Hotel Emeline	The Dewberry
Charming Inns	Hotel Indigo	The Francis Marion
Courtyard by Marriott	Hyatt Place Charleston Historic District	The Loutrel
HarbourView Inn	Moxy Charleston Downtown	The Mills House
Hilton Garden Inn Charleston Waterfront	Post House Inn	The Pinch
Hilton Garden Inn Charleston/ Mt Pleasant	Residence Inn Riverview	The Ryder Hotel
Homewood Suites	Springhill Suites Charleston/Mt Pleasant	The Spectator Hotel
		Tru by Hilton Charleston Airport
		Wild Dunes Resort



# Acknowledgements

## CASH + TRADE PARTNERS 2025



2XO	Coterie	Hamby Catering & The Rutledge Room	Nueske's	The Citadel
Advintage Distributing	Culinary Institute of Charleston at Trident Technical College	Hampton Water Rosé	Old Village Transportation	The European Union
Aleph Wines	Curated Selections	Harborside East	onetoone	Thermador
Arka	Cutting Edge Firewood	Heaven Hill	PDA	The Indigo Road Hospitality Group
Bardstown Bourbon Co.	Deep Eddy Vodka	High Wire Distilling Co.	Pearl Street Caviar	The Island House
Bear Island Distributors	Diageo	Hotaling & Co	Princess® Cruises	The Mills House
Boulevard Brewing Company	Discover South Carolina	Kamado Joe®	Rémy Cointreau	The Preserve
Bowens Island Restaurant	Duckhorn Wine Company	Krewe	RNDC	The Starlight Village
Breakthru Beverage	Duke's Mayo	Jackson Family Wines	Ruffino Estates	Tilit
Brown-Forman	E. & J. Gallo	LALO tequila	Saulisbury Business Machines	Tito's Handmade Vodka
Campari	Ethos Athletic Club	Landmark Vineyards	Saratoga Spring Water	Trinchero Family Estates
Certified South Carolina	Explore Charleston	Le Creuset	Smithey Ironware Company	Twelve South
Charleston International Airport	Firefly Distillery	Lee Distributing	Snyder	US Foods
Charleston Mix	Gibbes Museum of Art	Lowes Foods	South Atlantic Bank	Vacation Inc.
Château d'Esclans / Whispering Angel	Gourmet Foods International	Limehouse Produce	Southern Crown	Verterra
Cigars of Charleston	Grapevine Distributors	Manchester Farms Quail	Southern Glazers	Whitman's
Colavita	Grassroots Wines	Maple Leaf Farms	Spike	Winebow
College of Charleston	Graza	Mission Grape Distributors	Stateside Brands	Wines Of Sicily
College of Charleston Office of Tourism Analysis	Grow Food Carolina	Mom Water	Ste. Michelle Wines	Wisconsin Cheese
	Halperns'	New Orleans & Company	Stölzle Lausitz	Wölffer Estate Vineyard
		Blue Pearl	STOMO Mobile Storage	Zatarain's
				Zonin 1821

# Acknowledgements

*+thank you.*

Because of you our festival is successful.

Because of you our mission lives on.

Because of you our legacy is strengthened and our shared values of community, hospitality and philanthropy support the Lowcountry and all those who work so hard to make this area a sought-after destination in hospitality.

♡CHSWF





*Let's toast  
to twenty.*

CHSWF *20 years*

[chswf.org](https://chswf.org)

CHARLESTON WINE + FOOD  
IS 501(C)(3) ORGANIZATION