



COVER FEATURE

# Combating Food Insecurity *with a* Friendsgiving Tradition

BY AUDREY HANES PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELISSA DONNER

When four local restaurants and their community-minded owners come together during the holidays for a good cause, the result is something special. Later this month, The Parsonage, Southern Confections and The Rec Room will gather at Native Brew Works to raise money for The Food Bank of NEA for a day of Friendsgiving that has become a holiday staple for many of their charitable patrons.

Native Brew Works, a local brewery and eatery owned and operated by four friends, first opened its doors in 2021. Since then, its creative craft brews, fresh food and welcoming atmosphere have made it a favorite in the Jonesboro community. Owners Dustin and Ellen Hundley, Heath Gammill and Jackson Spencer, along with Jackson's wife, Lindsey, are always looking for ways to partner with other local restaurants and nonprofits, which is what they did four years ago before the first Friendsgiving.

"Friendsgiving is great representation of what Native is meant to be – a place to grow community through experiences, quality product and giving back to the very community that makes us thrive," said Jackson, who serves as Native's general manager.

"Native started it, and it was really Ellen's idea – she is great at coming up with and executing ideas and ways for us to be involved in the community," added Lindsey, Native's brand manager. "We knew we wanted it to benefit a nonprofit – most of our special events do – so we wanted to help stock the food bank. You don't want to think of anyone struggling to have a meal around the holidays. The Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas is the biggest provider in the area for food insecurities, and we want to do our part."

After deciding on Thanksgiving-style food, Native worked to team up with other local restaurants for the fundraiser and to give the collaborative charitable event more of a Friendsgiving feel. The Parsonage, Southern Confections and The Rec Room are all returning for their third year of the fourth annual event, and each bring something special to the event.

Native Brew Works will host its fourth annual Friendsgiving on Nov. 10 with a little help from their friends at The Parsonage, The Rec Room and Southern Confections. Proceeds from the annual event go to The Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas. Opposing page, right photo: Lindsey Spencer (clockwise from center), Megan Gammill, Jackson Spencer, Sarah Nobles, Dustin Hundley, Audra King, Ramey and John Myers, Brian Nobles, Brandon King, Heath Gammill and Ellen Hundley. Above: Ellen Hundley, Audra King, Ramey Myers, Sarah Nobles, Megan Gammill and Lindsey Spencer.

"Friendsgiving perfectly reflects what The Parsonage is all about – community, connection and sharing good food made with love," said Ramey Meyers, who owns The Parsonage in Downtown Jonesboro with her husband, Chef John Meyers. "It's a chance to give back and be part of something bigger than ourselves. In these times, now more than ever, The Food Bank of NEA needs our help. They do such incredible work feeding families in our own community. Supporting them through Friendsgiving is a way for us to use what we do best – food – to make a difference."

"There's so much heart behind Friendsgiving. Seeing our very own local restaurants and neighbors come together for a shared purpose is what makes it so special."

John is known for putting his own spin on traditional home-cooked dishes, and Friendsgiving is no exception.

"We're serving our cranberry sauce, dressing, scalloped potatoes and sweet potatoes, all comforting Southern favorites," said Ramey. "Chef loves taking the classics and putting his culinary twist to it."

The Rec Room, another Downtown Jonesboro business, has been involved with Friendsgiving for the past three years. Longtime restaurateurs Brian and Sarah Nobles took over the coffee bar and eatery in 2022 and are always looking for ways to give back to the community.

"We wanted to get involved because food insecurity is widespread in our area, and any event that benefits The Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas is a win-win in our book," said Sarah. "Not to mention, this event brings together some of the best local businesses Jonesboro has to offer. We're a fun, eclectic group, and that energy makes Friendsgiving so special. There's truly never a dull moment."

The Rec Room's contributions to Friendsgiving are as thoughtful and meaningful as its regular menu items.

"The Rec Room will be making banana pudding and green beans, both recipes that come from my mother," said Sarah. "To me, Thanksgiving is about going back to your roots, spending time with people you love, making sure no one leaves hungry and cooking those family recipes that have been passed down for generations."



Above: Heath Gammill, Brandon King, Brian Nobles, Jackson Spencer, Dustin Hundley and John Myers represent the restaurants participating in this year's fourth annual Friendsgiving: Native Brew Works, Southern Confections, The Rec Room and The Parsonage.

Southern Confections, a local bakery turned coffeehouse and eatery, has been serving up sweets to Jonesboro since 2018. In combination with IV Kings Coffee, owners Brandon and Audra King encourage their customers to slow the hurry and enjoy handcrafted coffee and delicious food, like the pecan cobbler, dinner rolls and sweet tea they'll provide for Friendsgiving.

"Our purpose is to serve others, and our heart is to bring community together; this event does both," said Audra. "We get the opportunity to serve the community for a great cause."

"We love collaborating with local businesses. Local businesses are the heartbeat of any city, and when businesses can work together for a common goal or purpose, magic is created. There is an energy at this event that brings us back each year and makes us grateful to be a part of it."

Lindsey echoed the same sentiment – that the collaboration among the local restaurateurs turned friends is part of what makes Friendsgiving so special.

"We love each other and love working together," said Lindsey. "Friendsgiving is a ton of work, but it's so special to be able to cook and work alongside these other people who work in the industry. ... It's so cool to all be in the kitchen together. Everyone is so good at their job, it just works. We go to their businesses, they come to ours, so it's just so nice to come together one night."

"The food is the best part, but I also love the collaboration. ... Each of these businesses have a different brand and skillset and customer base, but they all have a heart for a community. As someone who is usually working solely for Native, getting to work alongside them and see their passion, it's really cool."

In addition to the months of planning and providing the venue itself, Native provides the turkey for Friendsgiving, which is smoked by Heath. Also available for purchase during both Friendsgiving seatings will be four seasonal small batch brews, which Dustin has been working on for months.

From one seating raising \$1,000 in 2022 to 120 people raising \$3,500 in 2024, the restaurateurs would love to have 200 patrons attend Friendsgiving 2025, which will also raise more money for the food bank thanks to sponsors Gearhead Outfitters Inc., Signature Bank of Arkansas and Ramsons Inc.

"We're grateful to be part of such a meaningful event and thankful for this community that always shows up with open hearts and helping hands," said Ramey.

Friendsgiving 2025 will have 5 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. seatings on Nov. 10 at Native Brew Works, located at 515 S. Gee St. Tickets for the 21-and-older event are \$40 each; drinks are not included. For tickets and more information, go to [nativebrewworks.com](http://nativebrewworks.com).

# Friendsgiving

## 2025

NOVEMBER 10TH | 5PM OR 7:30PM

AT NATIVE BREW WORKS

Tickets are \$40.

\*This is a 21 and older event. Drinks not included.

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