

Let them eat pancakes: Café breakfasts will benefit nonprofits  
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Since opening in the Jefferson School City Center in January, the Vinegar Hill Café has blossomed into a cheerful bistro loved by regulars for its artisan sandwiches, fresh-baked pastries and burgers made from beef from grass-fed cattle. But soon, a clever scheme to help local nonprofits will add flapjacks to the menu.

“Our pancake breakfasts will have a two-fold purpose,” explained cafe manager Joel Schechtman. “They’ll give nonprofits a really easy fundraising opportunity. And when nonprofits use this great space and spread the word about the cafe, that will help us too.”

Beginning in September, Vinegar Hill Café will partner with an area nonprofit on Saturday mornings to host a hotcake buffet. In exchange for rallying pancake-lovers and lending a hand in the kitchen, nonprofits will receive a \$2 donation for each \$8 ticket redeemed.

“Making the pancakes has to be a team effort,” said Schechtman, a longtime restaurant owner who moved to Charlottesville two years ago. “We’ll be up to our elbows in batter.”

Breakfast slots have been going like hotcakes — close to a dozen nonprofits have already signed up for a turn with the griddle. But if Schechtman had his way, the cafe would be booked every Saturday of the year.

“We want to give people a good, comfort-food feeling,” he said. “There will be toppings, including local blueberries and strawberries when they’re in season. We’ll even put a smiley face on your pancakes by

request.”

The pancake breakfasts may prove a shrewd business move for the Vinegar Hill Café, helping to attract attention for the newcomer to Charlottesville’s competitive restaurant scene. But the real motive for the project is not profit.



*A monthly writing critique group BACCA Literary, meets at the cafe.*

*Group members A.M. Carley (L), Carolyn O’Neal, Bethany Carlson (back), and Claire Cameron (R)*

The Jefferson Area Board for Aging owns and operates the cafe to provide nutritious, local food to children enrolled in Piedmont Family YMCA programs at the Jefferson School and to seniors at the Mary Williams Senior Center, as well as to the public. The cafe also functions as a small group-meeting space for a host of nonprofits.

“Many of our volunteers visit the cafe every day,” said Ellen Osborne, executive director of Literacy Volunteers, one of the nine nonprofit organizations housed in the Jefferson School City Center.

Osborne said the cafe has become a popular place for literacy tutors to work with their students.

“It’s great to have an informal place, since our office can get pretty intense,” she said. “The cafe staff is always very gracious and accommodating, and Joel is a great guy.”

The Literacy Volunteers plan to sign up for a pancake breakfast fundraiser soon.

One nonprofit that has already done so is Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church, a Unitarian Universalist congregation with a mission to promote diversity and social justice in Charlottesville.

“We’re not good proselytizers,” said Elizabeth Breeden, an active member of the church. “So when somebody gives us the chance to raise a little money and get out into the community at the same time, that’s a great opportunity.”

Breeden is especially enthused that, through pancakes, the church will be able to help more people discover the Jefferson School City Center.

“The Jefferson School is an amazing source of outreach,” Breeden said. “In the South, a lot of community engagement is faith-led. But we also need to have the ability to connect through places like the Jefferson School.”

Currently, the Vinegar Hill Café welcomes a steady stream of customers for breakfast and lunch Monday through Saturday. When Piedmont Virginia Community College classes held at the Jefferson School resume Monday, the cafe will expand its hours to accommodate students taking evening classes.



The cafe also helps nonprofits housed in the Jefferson School, including the African American Heritage Center and Common Grounds Healing Arts, by holding monthly Chill’n and Grill’n evenings.

“The first Thursday of every month, we have backyard-style barbeque with live acoustic music and activities for kids,” Schechtman said. “People from the nonprofits come out to set up tables and mingle

with the public.”

The next Chill’n and Grill’n is planned for Sept. 5.

To sign up for a pancake breakfast at the Vinegar Hill Café, nonprofits should contact Taikia Walker at 245-5811 or taikiawalker@.