

# Ashland Market and Cafe

SUBMITTED BY  
NINA BERMAN

Mandela Partners' 2,100 square foot food hall space in Ashland is set to open to the community with a Grand Opening celebration on Saturday, March 23. The Ashland

various community groups to lead listening sessions, conduct surveys, and collect personal accounts centered around food access and economic opportunity in unincorporated Alameda County. Once the "food hall" concept took shape, additional feedback was gathered to ensure that the



Market & Cafe will serve as a food business incubator, providing opportunity for community-owned businesses to grow into full-service retail for the very first time. Created in partnership with Resources for Community Development (RCD) and Alameda County Economic Development Agency, the Market & Cafe will house four local food businesses and serve as a community gathering space. The 2019 inaugural vendors are Thank Que Grill, Jacquelyn's Heart & Soul, I Am Cafe, and AndreaMarie Cakes & Treats.

The Ashland Market & Cafe was conceived through a community engagement process that sought to increase access to food and economic opportunity through resident-led decision making. Mandela Partners' model pivots away from development that promotes expansion of chain stores, and instead uplifts local assets, and creates tangible economic opportunities for community residents and local businesses.

"To have my own restaurant on the corner of where I grew up; it's a dream," says Jacquelyn Chancellor, co-owner of Jacquelyn's Heart & Soul, who grew up across the street from the Ashland Market & Cafe.

By partnering with affordable housing developer, Resources for Community Development, and



businesses selected would be responsive to the identified needs to ensure that residents would benefit from the prepared food offerings.

"There's nothing to eat in the neighborhood but fast food; to have real food, choices, variety, that's the Ashland Market &

the engagement and feedback collection. The CAC reviewed community feedback results and was tasked with interviewing, assessing, and selecting candidates.

Mandela Partners supported outreach to ensure that local entrepreneurs were aware of the opportunity and applicants were screened by the CAC, guided by information gathered through community surveys and a personal understanding of neighborhood needs. Ultimately, the inaugural class of the Ashland Market & Cafe was selected based on community fit, interview performance, and food taste and presentation.

"I first saw the opportunity on the community board of the building I live in," says Andrea Scott, owner of AndreaMarie Cakes & Treats and Ashland Place resident. "At first it was scary, but I thought this is an opportunity to show people who I am."

Once the Ashland Market & Cafe entrepreneur selection process was completed, selected entrepreneurs along with other community businesses, were invited to attend a Basic Business Development training series led in partnership with Centro Community Partners. The workshop series gave entrepreneurs the time and resources to build a basic business plan and develop their food business concept. After graduating from Centro's training, selected businesses moved into one-on-one advising and culinary development programming made available through Mandela Partners.

Rene Lontoc, owner of Thank Que Grill, states that "the incubation process is made easier because Mandela is there to guide us and bounce off ideas, to brainstorm together."

Mandela has hosted a series of culinary development workshops, experiential learning modules including trainings, as well as free open kitchen hours – with kitchen space made available by the Hayward Area Recreation and Park District – which allowed entrepreneurs to develop recipes

with expert help from Bay Area restaurant consultant Marcella Lew.

"This process allowed for us to put 'pen to paper' and actually go from just hustling, to having the confidence to say, 'I own a business,'" says LaShawn Raybon, owner of I Am Cafe. "[We] think on a broader scale and are given the measure of growth from kitchen to a retail space. We have more at stake now."

The four food businesses have hosted pop-up food events, market-tested their products through community surveying, and perfected their products and full menus before the grand opening. "Pushing everything out and getting responses made it real," says Bryant. "People really like our food, want our food, and there's a demand for it. [We know] how to talk to customers, what to expect with a rush, timing, and when things mess up, how to troubleshoot and fix them."

There will be food for sale from the 2019 inaugural vendors at the Grand Opening with special guest speaker Supervisor Nate Miley and project partners Alameda County Community Development Agency, RCD Housing, Mandela Partners, and Ashland Market & Cafe.

**Ashland Market & Cafe Grand Opening**  
**Saturday, Mar 23**  
**12 noon – 4 p.m.**  
**Ashland Market & Cafe**  
**16395 E 14th St, San Leandro**

**info@ashlandmarket.org**  
**https://mandelapartners.wixsite.com/ashlandmarket**  
**www.facebook.com/ashland-market/**



the Alameda County Economic Development Agency, Mandela Partners was able to activate an affordable retail opportunity that will support local entrepreneurship and build wealth in unincorporated Alameda County.

In phase one, Mandela Partners worked with local leadership and

Cafe," comments Latoya Bryant, co-owner of Jacquelyn's Heart & Soul and resident of Ashland Village.

Next, a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was assembled, consisting of 12 community members that had been an integral part of the first phase of

