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AltonWorks Brings 6x Emmy Nominated Danish Master Chef and Food is Love Host Lasse Sorensen to Alton to Help Launch Alton as a Culinary Destination

Alton, IL – February 13, 2024 – It’s the season of love, and AltonWorks is ready to share the love in Alton. Today, AltonWorks announced that it is bringing Danish Master Chef and Food is Love host Lasse Sorensen to Alton to help foster the city as a regional culinary destination.

What makes a city a culinary destination? Ethnic food choices. Affordability. Outdoor dining options. Community support. Strategic planning. A farm to table focus. Walkability. Easy access. An environment where food enthusiastically connects friends, families and even strangers.

“Creating a vibrant, accessible food community and culinary destination in downtown Alton is a part of AltonWorks’ long-term strategy to revitalize this great city,” said Alton resident and AltonWorks CEO John Simmons. “To help foster this vision, Master Chef Lasse Sorensen will relocate his home and his 6x Emmy nominated ‘Food is Love’ program to Alton.” The Food is Love headquarters will be located at 223 Market in downtown Alton in an AltonWorks property.

Alton is fortunate to have many fantastic restaurants, which will provide an incredible base off of which to grow. Much of AltonWorks’ focus will be on supporting current restauranters, attracting new restaurants, working with Lasse to help the company plan restaurants housed in AltonWorks’ buildings (like the Wedge Innovation Center) and drawing attention to Alton as a food destination through the Food is Love program.

Born and raised on the outskirts of Copenhagen, Denmark, Master Chef Lasse Sorensen is no stranger to good food. Sorensen spent much of his youth in the kitchen helping his father, who was a pastry chef for the Danish royal family. Lasse (pronounced Lasser) move to the United States in 1989 to pursue big opportunities, including his dream of opening his own restaurant. For more than 20 years, Sorensen, along with his wife Mary Jane, owned and operated Tom’s Place in Southern Illinois, which closed in 2023.

His culinary experience, paired with his passion for the St. Louis region and its diverse culture sparked the idea for “Food is Love,” a series that focuses on the region’s best and most authentic food dishes and the concept of how food can bring people together.

“I couldn’t be more excited about bringing Food is Love to Alton and becoming an official member of the Alton community,” said Lasse who currently lives in Desoto, Illinois. “Downtown Alton has unlimited potential to be a tremendous food destination,

much like cities throughout Europe – diverse, accessible, and rich in culture. I look forward to highlighting Alton in my national and international travels with Food is Love and fostering a collaborative and creative food community for all who want to be a part of this big dream.”

Over the past three years, Food is Love was broadcast on the PBS television network. Food lovers can still enjoy those episodes on streaming and broadcast stations to be announced in the coming months. The 2024 season of Food is Love has begun production and will air later this year.

A thriving food community needs a diverse mix of restaurants, and a welcoming atmosphere for people of all backgrounds, ages and cultural tastes, strategic planning, city planning, community development, tourism, marketing and investment.

AltonWorks began its investment in the food community in 2019 with the opening of Theodora Farms in Godfrey, Illinois, which is an organic farm and farm store that serves the Illinois Riverbend region and St. Louis Metropolitan area. When the pandemic hit in 2020, Alton Forward, a non-profit arm of AltonWorks, worked with the Madison County and the Alton communities to provide food to those in need through the toughest months of the pandemic through Project Care.

In 2022, AltonWorks opened Alton’s first food truck park called Flock Food Truck Park and Bar, located at 210 Ridge between Broadway and Landmarks Blvd. and adjacent to the Jacoby Arts Center. Flock is a family-friendly venue in downtown Alton built to bring friends and families together for delicious, unique food, outdoor fun and lasting memories. Flock is the brainchild of Jayne Simmons, who has dreamed of fostering a place where people can go to pick up a quick, delicious meal and just spend time together. More culinary opportunities are currently being planned for the spring opening of Flock. Additional information will be forthcoming.

While the farm to table concept is not new, Alton is a perfect location for food innovation, casual and fine dining experiences as it has a rich culinary and farming community that supports a variety of culinary options.

Alton is surrounded by rich farmland and a wealth of available water resources. The region is also home to many small family and startup farms. Some specialize in organic vegetable production, including Theodora Farms in Godfrey and Three Rivers Community Farm in Elsah, while others focus on pasture-raised meat production such as Fresh Pasture Farms in Millstadt and Coriander Fields in Dorsey.

Alton’s independent restaurants, pie shops, and certified organic craft brewery are utilizing the region’s many heritage producers, orchards, and farms. Alton is becoming the hub of this food ecosystem transformation and local and regional food culture, in turn, strengthening small farms and producers, making healthy foods more accessible and affordable, and engaging chefs and restaurants to innovate, all benefits for the local community.

About AltonWorks

AltonWorks is a social impact redevelopment company focused on the revitalization of Historic Downtown Alton as a healthy, thriving, walkable city. AltonWorks was founded on the principles of livability, environmental stewardship, social justice, and inclusivity and believes rebuilding communities for optimum social impact. As an intermediary organization, AltonWorks offers thought leadership, planning, convening, and connecting, adding capacity to the Region's ability to attract funding, expand social impact, catalyze economic growth, and anchor downstate recovery.

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