

[https://www.news-gazette.com/business/restaurants/barbecue-vouchers-aimed-at-inspiring-acts-of-kindness/article\\_c5db4815-d496-520d-8976-ff03e23a0912.html](https://www.news-gazette.com/business/restaurants/barbecue-vouchers-aimed-at-inspiring-acts-of-kindness/article_c5db4815-d496-520d-8976-ff03e23a0912.html)

FEATURED

TOP STORY

*'National Day of Love'*

## Barbecue vouchers aimed at inspiring acts of kindness

By MARY SCHENK [mschenk@news-gazette.com](mailto:mschenk@news-gazette.com)

Mar 18, 2023



Wood N' Hog Barbecue owner Michael McDonald serves a customer at the restaurant's Urbana location in April 2022.

Anthony Zillis/The News-Gazette

URBANA — If you're feeling amorous today, Wood N' Hog Barbecue in Urbana is the place to be.

From 11 a.m. to about 3 p.m., anyone coming through the door will be given a voucher for \$10 off an order in celebration of "National Day of Love," courtesy of the Banks Foundation Inc., and restaurant co-owners Michael McDonald and his sister, Okema Battle.

"It started in 2017 in Houston, Texas," said McDonald. "Each year on the third Saturday in March they celebrate love through giving."

"They" are McDonald's University of Illinois college buddies, Charles and Deidre Banks. The trio all attended the UI about the same time, beginning in 1999.

Charles Banks earned his degree in mechanical engineering while Deidre Banks, who married her husband in 2007 after graduation, got bachelor's and master's degrees in accountancy.

"They are just kind and generous," said McDonald of his fellow alumni and longtime friends, who have done well in their professions and are committed to sharing.

"They are going to come in and set up a booth in our restaurant and, as patrons come in, they will give them a voucher for a discount. They hope people would then reciprocate the act of kindness," said McDonald, who's enjoyed a bit of success with his delectable barbecue.

McDonald and his sister started humbly in a north Champaign strip mall in 2016.

In 2019, they moved their operation to the site of the former Li'l Porgy's at 101 W. University Ave., U. They also have a location at 500 N. Walnut St., downtown Champaign, open only Monday through Friday.

"We're doing really well," said McDonald. "I think COVID actually gave us a different perspective. If you can get through COVID, you can get through anything. People were very driven to keep the smalls (locally-owned restaurants) open."

McDonald is grateful to the regulars who have kept his business going and immediately said yes when the Bankses contacted him about partnering with them for National Day of Love.

"We're going to match their generosity," said McDonald of the \$1,000 worth of vouchers that the Banks Foundation intends to hand out.

**Research Sleep Apnea Options: What are the Ways to Relieve Sleep Apnea**  
Sleep Apnea | Yahoo! Search | Sponsored

[Read Next Story >](#)

“Our hope is to make this become contagious. We see people do it in line at the grocery store and Starbucks,” he said of folks who offer to pay for someone else’s order.

McDonald said customers who come through the doors of his restaurant have the means to pay and the intention to buy the food they prepare. He’s hoping to reach a few others today.

“I told some social workers at school who know families who normally don’t patronize us because they can’t afford it. I’ve encouraged people to come during that time. If you come in, we are going to take care of you. You can order what you want. The goal is to help families,” he said.

He hopes that those who have the means to pay will perhaps buy an extra meal and give it to someone else or just pay forward the kindness in another way.

That’s what the Banks Foundation is all about, said CEO Deidre Banks.

“Purposeful acts of love are planned events or actions used to positively affect our communities through love,” she said.

Deidre Banks, who said she loved accounting and worked for both Exxon and the Internal Revenue Service in that field, left her paying job to run the foundation that she and her husband started about six years ago.

She said she drew inspiration and support from Jennifer LeClaire, founder of Awakening Prayer Hub, a Florida-based global prayer movement in 76 countries.

Charles Banks continues to work for Exxon as an engineer, a position he’s held for almost 20 years. They are the parents of Charles, 9, and Michael, 13.

They started their foundation in Houston, where they spent 14 years of their lives in their respective fields. They now live in Naperville.

A large part of their mission is to award scholarships to college freshmen and sophomores interested in leadership, caring about others and giving back to their communities.

At the end of 2021, they endowed the “National Day of Love Community Scholarship” at the UI with their own money and matching help from Exxon.

**Research Sleep Apnea Options: What are the Ways  
to Relieve Sleep Apnea**  
Sleep Apnea | Yahoo! Search | Sponsored

**Read Next Story** >

They also have assisted with school supplies and other community outreach programs.

The giving-away-food idea began last year.

“We did it in Bolingbrook at a soul food restaurant,” said Deidre Banks.

She and her husband instructed the owner that after people ordered to tell them the payment was taken care of.

“We sat in the back and watched. That was a lot of fun. We were able to take care of 25 families,” she said of that day’s effort.

Knowing McDonald and having ties to the UI, Wood N’ Hog was an easy choice to help spread their message of love this year. They intend to have their sons present to assist.

“Certain things validate and reinforce,” a grateful and excited McDonald said of the type of generosity they plan today. “When they reached out, I said, ‘Let’s do it.’ This community is generous.”

---

## Mary Schenk

Reporter

Mary Schenk is a reporter covering police, courts and breaking news at The News-Gazette. Her email is [mschenk@news-gazette.com](mailto:mschenk@news-gazette.com), and you can follow her on Twitter (@schenk).

var infolinks\_pid = 3299954; var infolinks\_wsid = 1;

**Research Sleep Apnea Options: What are the Ways to Relieve Sleep Apnea**

Sleep Apnea | Yahoo! Search | Sponsored

**Read Next Story** >