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Lovington MainStreet's Local Innovators Institute Inaugural Program Thriving, Funded for Next Year

Food Service Accelerator Program Supported Five Restaurant Entrepreneurs

Lovington, N.M. – [Lovington MainStreet](#) welcomed five entrepreneurs to the first cohort of the [Local Innovators Institute](#) in February 2020. After successfully completing seven weeks of educational and hands-on training, Lovington is getting to taste a variety of cuisines in downtown. Since May, each entrepreneur is getting a chance to occupy the Local Innovators Institute's food truck for two weeks in order to build their business and sell their product. The main goal of this program is to position Lovington as a destination by creating a dining and entertainment district in downtown.

"New Mexico's creativity and innovation will be significant strengths in our economic recovery," Economic Development Secretary Alicia J. Keyes said. "The Local Innovators Institute is an impressive program that will be a major economic catalyst for Lovington."

The five entrepreneurs in the program are:

- Brad Clayton, [B-Crabby Cajun Style](#) (Lovington) – Cajun-Style Food. Brings Cajun flavor to his hometown in Lovington.
- Gabriel Ruiz, [Big G's Mac and Cheese](#) (Hobbs) – Mac & Cheese. Re-invents comfort food in a creative way.
- Josh Vigil, [North of The Border](#) (Lovington) – Northern NM Entrees. Made with his traditional family recipes and NM-grown chile.
- Sherryann Baggoo, [Trinilov](#) (Hobbs) – Traditional Caribbean Cuisine. Brings the tastes of her home country, Trinidad and Tobago, to Lovington.
- Mariah McLlroy, [Yaya's Cocina](#) (Hobbs) – Healthy, Organic, Fresh Mexican Cuisine. Offers a seasonal, fresh, high-quality menu in her food truck and with special event catering.

New Mexico MainStreet (NMMS) supported the program with technical assistance from expert Revitalization Specialists to help develop the training curriculum. The curriculum included: concept development, menu pricing, market analysis, customer discovery,

branding, marketing, health, safety & permitting, business planning, and hands-on experience in the food truck.

“The Local Innovators Institute is a significant success story because it gave entrepreneurs the opportunity to try their concept in the real world before taking on a huge risk, such as converting a vacant building into a restaurant,” NMMS Director Daniel Gutierrez said. “We’re proud to support this inventive program and look forward to the continued success of Lovington MainStreet’s hard work.”

The program was funded by a \$75,900 grant from USDA in 2019. Lovington MainStreet is excited to announce that USDA has funded a \$50,000 grant to continue the program in 2020-2021.

“I have been receiving so many calls about this program because it has really taken off and inspired the community,” Lovington MainStreet Executive Director Mara Salcido said. “In August, we hope to have a ‘Demo Day’ closing ceremony so we can invite local investors and bankers to see/taste what these entrepreneurs have learned from the program.”

Lovington MainStreet partnered the entrepreneurs with restaurant mentors from the community and provided guest speakers in the training. Mentors included partners from Baja Grill and Drylands Brewing; Guest speakers included Wesst (HR policy), NM Junior College (workforce training and provided food protector certifications), NM Health Department field representatives (food safety), Lovington Chamber of Commerce, and local banks (loans).

“I am very thankful to the Lovington MainStreet Corporation for the opportunity to bring my food to Lovington,” Trinilov owner Sherryann Baggoo said. “I enjoyed seeing people try and taste something different. Thanks to all those that supported Trinilov, I look forward to more great things to come!”

“The Local Innovators Institute is an example of a community-focused organization identifying areas of opportunity and creating programs to capitalize on those opportunities,” NMMS Business and Entrepreneur Development Revitalization Specialist Sean O’Shea said. “Mara and Lovington MainStreet created a unique and effective program providing skills training, resource connections, and real on-the-ground experience to expand and enhance the dining and entertainment options in Lovington’s downtown. I am proud to have worked with Mara on creating and implementing this program and look forward to Lovington’s ascension as a foodie destination.”

Two of the entrepreneurs (Brad Clayton and Mariah McLlroy) have since purchased their own food trucks and both will be operational by the end of the month. Through this program, these two entrepreneurs were able to get the necessary health permits for their new trucks.

The COVID pandemic has made an impact on this program, some of which were unexpectedly beneficial including:

- People don’t want to eat indoors in confined spaces right now. The food truck model is helping reduce the risk of virus exposure because people can get their food and sit outdoors at Plaza Park, which has physically-distant seating.
- Since people are not traveling, they are home and looking for opportunities in their community. This program provides an opportunity for people to try a variety of new concepts in their own backyard and support the local economy.
- With many community members suffering from unemployment or low employment, this program provides an opportunity to explore other venues and work options.

Applications for the next cohort will open in January 2021; however, since this program has been so massively successful, Lovington MainStreet is considering offering the program twice a year going forward. The application requires a \$50 application fee. Entrepreneurs pay for

their own ingredients in the food truck, and if they make a profit, 3 percent of those profits goes back to the program.



Lovington MainStreet Executive Director Mara Salcido with Trinilov owner Sherryann Baggio.



The Local Innovators Institute food truck.



Big G's Mac and Cheese customers.

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About New Mexico MainStreet: New Mexico MainStreet develops local capacity to engage people, rebuild places and grow the entrepreneurial, creative & business environment resulting in economically thriving downtowns, greater business & employment opportunities and a higher quality of life.



Learn more about New Mexico MainStreet's programs and initiatives at www.nmmainstreet.org. New Mexico MainStreet is a program of the New Mexico Economic Development Department, gonm.biz.

The New Mexico Economic Development Department's mission is to improve the lives of New Mexico families by increasing economic opportunities and providing a place for businesses to thrive.

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