FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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PRESS RELEASE

Dartmouth Restaurant Transitioning to a Community Kitchen During COVID-19 Crisis
The Canteen Gears Up to Prepare Over 300 Meals a Week For Community Organizations

DARTMOUTH, NS - Beginning the week of April 13, The Canteen on Portland, located in downtown Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, will be temporarily transitioning to ‘The Canteen Community Kitchen’. Under the new name, The Canteen will be working with both the Dartmouth North Community Food Centre and Margaret’s House (Feeding Others of Dartmouth Society) in downtown Dartmouth to prepare 300-400 meals per week for distribution to those in need. The COVID-19 crisis has amplified the issue of food insecurity in the community, while simultaneously constraining not-for-profit organizational capacity due to social distancing policies.

On Monday, March 16th, the husband and wife restaurant team of Doug Townsend and Renée Lavallée announced that they would be temporarily closing The Canteen (and sister restaurant Little C) due to the COVID-19 virus. They had to immediately lay off the majority of their 30-person team, which was easily the hardest business decision that either of them has had to make in their careers. “Soon after the restaurant closed, we quickly turned our attention to figuring out how we could use our facility and remaining employees to support those being severely impacted by this crisis” explains Lavallée.

After being inspired by how chefs and restaurants have been stepping up in other cities, the first call that Townsend and Lavallée made was to Wendy Fraser, executive director of The Dartmouth Family Centre and The Dartmouth North Community Food Centre. The Canteen has been an avid supporter of this organization for the past five years and it was only natural to find a way to partner during this crisis. "The biggest challenge we face right now is keeping up with demand. Usually, our kitchen would be full of volunteers helping us prepare meals, but that's not possible at this time. We need more space to prepare more meals" says Fraser. This week the centre provided almost 500 take out meals and more than 200 packages of emergency food and supplies. But community need is growing. "Doug and Renee were among our earliest supporters; they've cooked alongside us regularly since we opened our doors. They know how we work. They know our community. We are so grateful that they can get this up and running quickly and safely" she explains.

Transitioning to the Community Kitchen model allows The Canteen to quickly leverage their commercial kitchen which is currently sitting idle. “We’re focussed on applying all of our energy to doing what we do best - safely and efficiently preparing a large volume of nutritious meals. Our partners are then able to focus on what they do best - supporting vulnerable communities by distributing these meals to those most in need” Townsend remarks. Although many of the details have yet to be worked out, The Canteen will also be partnering with other like minded businesses in the community to find ways to help support this initiative. “As the need continues to grow, we want to make sure that we have the resources required to rise to the challenge” he continues.
Since day one, The Canteen has worked hard to support their community in a variety of ways. Now, more than ever, they are committed to this philosophy - by putting the needs of the community ahead of their own. They hope that other businesses follow suit by finding creative solutions to do the same so that we can all get through this crisis safely together.

People can follow The Canteen Community Kitchen’s journey on social media at Facebook (www.facebook.com/thecanteenns) and Instagram (@thecanteenns).

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About The Canteen
The Canteen on Portland is an award-winning neighbourhood hotspot in downtown Dartmouth, run by the local husband and wife team of chef Renée Lavallée and Doug Townsend. With seasonal menus and a strong focus on local products, The Canteen specializes in chef-inspired dishes served for lunch, dinner and Saturday brunch.

About The Dartmouth Family Centre/Dartmouth North Community Food Centre
The Dartmouth Family Centre/Dartmouth North Community Food Centre is a community hub that offers a dynamic, dignified place for people to learn and connect through family, support, food and friendship. The Family Centre has served the community for more than 25 years and the Community Food Centre is one of 13 similar centres across Canada.

About Margaret’s House (Feeding Others of Dartmouth Society)
Feeding Others of Dartmouth Society, or F.O.O.D., as it is known today, began in the late 1960s as a nutrition/cooking class for low-income women who were on social assistance. F.O.O.D. is a registered charitable organization that provides a free nutritious hot meal to adults in need in the Halifax Regional Municipality. The program serves a meal seven days a week, with approximately 3,000 meals served each month.

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For more information, please contact:

Doug Townsend, Co-Owner
doug@thecanteen.ca
Mobile: 902-430-5960
www.thecanteen.ca

Renée Lavallée, Chef / Co-Owner
renee@thecanteen.ca
Mobile: 902-223-2140
www.thecanteen.ca