PRESS RELEASE

La Cocina Executive Director Caleb Zigas Bids Farewell to Organization After 16 Years
Search for New Leader Begins

San Francisco, California - August 11, 2021 - Caleb Zigas, Executive Director of San Francisco-based La Cocina, will be leaving the nonprofit organization at the end of 2021 after 16 years. La Cocina’s board, staff and Zigas began working on succession and transition planning in 2016 with an eye towards a December 2020 exit. Anticipating a departure in December 2020, Zigas agreed to continue leading the organization when the Covid-19 pandemic broke. The public announcement of his planned leave in December 2021 was made today through an open letter he wrote on La Cocina’s website and coincides with the search for the organization’s new leader.

La Cocina - “the kitchen” in Spanish - is a food incubator that opened its doors in 2005 to cultivate low-income women of color and immigrant entrepreneurs in formalizing and growing their food businesses. Since its inception, La Cocina has incubated more than 130 food businesses, graduated nearly 60 entrepreneurs, and supported the launch of over 30 brick-and-mortar locations around the Bay Area with many recognized on national best restaurant lists.

Zigas, who started with the organization as a volunteer, helped build the original infrastructure for La Cocina’s award-winning incubator program, which provides food entrepreneurs affordable commercial kitchen space, business mentorship, and access to market opportunities. Under his leadership, the organization has grown beyond the incubator to launch the decade-long San Francisco Street Food Festival, the We Are La Cocina cookbook and other popular storytelling events, and the La Cocina Municipal Marketplace, the nation’s first women-led food hall. In May 2020, Zigas was recognized by the James Beard Foundation with a leadership award for his efforts in shepherding La Cocina’s work.

“I’m grateful and honored to have been a part of this incredible organization for the past 16 years and so very proud of the talented entrepreneurs and what we’ve accomplished together,” said Zigas. “La Cocina has always been a product of an enormous community -- talented leadership staff, innovative entrepreneurs, committed volunteers, generous partners and funders, and a rich and robust food community. The last year has shown that the team and the businesses are capable of managing extraordinarily difficult situations and turning them into amazing opportunities.”

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“Institutional stagnation is real with leadership tethered to organizations for too long,” continued Zigas. “My love for La Cocina had nothing to do with me being its executive director, and I love the work and the organization so much that it'll always be part of my life. I know that fresh eyes will benefit the businesses, the organization, and our broader movement for a more equitable economy.”

Koya Partners will lead the search for La Cocina’s new executive director over the next few months with the goal of having a successor named by December 2021, if not earlier. In the last three years, the organization has grown significantly in budget and staff and seeks to hire someone who can steer the organization through its maturity and toward longevity -- with a passion for La Cocina’s mission, a relationship builder and thought leader, an ambassador and fundraiser, and strong organizational leader.

Upon leaving, Zigas plans to take time off to enjoy his family and remain a strong supporter of La Cocina.

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About La Cocina
La Cocina is a 501(c)3 nonprofit food business incubator that works to solve problems of equity in business ownership; inclusivity in the mainstream American marketplace; barriers to entry for women, people of color, and immigrant business owners; and the too-high cost of entry for the food industry generally. Learn more about our Covid-19 relief efforts at https://lacocinasf.org/covid19.

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