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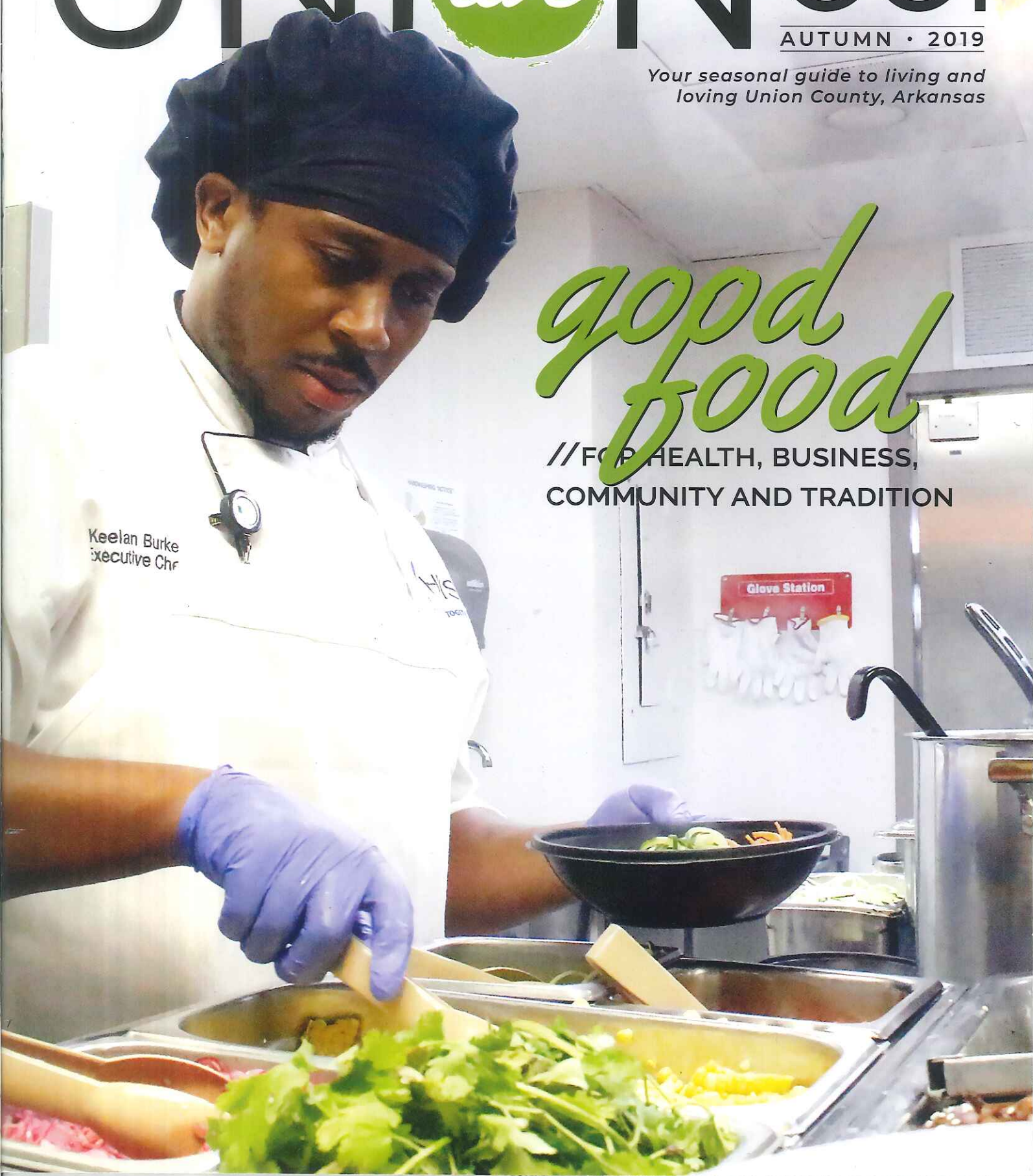
AUTUMN • 2019

Your seasonal guide to living and  
loving Union County, Arkansas

*good  
food*

// FOR HEALTH, BUSINESS,  
COMMUNITY AND TRADITION

Keelan Burke  
Executive Chef







# good food

## THAT'S GOOD FOR YOU

Medical Center chef strives to make good food people want

*Text and Photography by Caleb Slinkard*

hospita food doesn't conjure up the greatest mental images: Jello, rubbery chicken, cold broccoli.

It's a stereotype that Keelan Burke, chef at the Medical Center of South Arkansas, is destroying, one happy customer at a time. MSCA renovated its cafeteria last year, and it's a sight to see. First, there's the main dining area – Café 870. The café features numerous food options, from a salad bar to a hot bar to the chef's table, and the hospital can cater to a variety of preferences and diets.

"When you come to the chef's table, you know it's going to be outside the box of southern Arkansas," Burke, who is originally from New Orleans, said. "But, at the same time, we're going to have a location where you can get your old favorites. There's also a home station, where you're going to find meat-





**CHEF EXTRAORDINAIRE:** (facing page) New Orleans native Chef Keelan Burke likes to offer a mix of favorites and out-of-the-ordinary. (This page) The Bean & Bistro is popular among members of the medical staff and the public.

loaf, gravy, fried foods. On Wednesdays, we have a featured boneless chicken wing, we do specialty sandwiches. We have a pasta bar with Italian sausage, chicken and vegetable options to mix with it, too."

It's a combination of classics and new approaches that keeps people coming back. On Thursdays, the café features Burke's ramen noodles, a special dish he spent months perfecting with a variety of noodle, vegetable and meat options. Fridays are sushi days. Every Sunday, there's a traditional turkey dinner with all the fixings.

Burke's food is influenced by his upbringing in New Orleans, where eating fantastic seafood with his father remains a fond memory, to stops in Texas and now Arkansas.

"It's not as different as I thought it would be, but, at the same time, you definitely get a lot more country up here," he said with a laugh. "You talk to any chef, they'll let you know that in their travels, you pick up so much from every place you go. It's a culmination of everything. For instance, in New Orleans, when we talk about beans, we're talking about red beans. Here, it's more like pinto beans, purple hull peas."

In an adjoining room is the Bean & Bistro, which serves sandwiches made to order and is open for more extended hours than the café, ensuring hospital staff and visitors have access to fresh food nearly

around the clock.

The sandwiches are made out of Boar's Head meats and cheeses. A wide variety of meat and cheese, from black forest ham to Genoa salami to smoked-Gouda, can be purchased by the pound at MCSA.

Judy Fussell, MCSA's culinary director, has worked at the hospital since 1986. She said that the first day new CEO Scott Street came to the hospital, he visited the cafeteria, and shared a vision with her about what it could be.

"After 33 years, this is kind of a whole new world for me," she said. "This is a vision I've had for years, and Scott shared that vision. After that meeting, my mission was to make it a reality."

Part of that vision included creating a place where family members of patients can come to get away and feel like they're not in a hospital anymore. There's a gallery of local art on the wall, and the dining room is decidedly closer to what you would find in a local restaurant than a hospital. The café also gives hospital staff in-house breakfast and lunch options.

"The staff loves it," Fussell said, adding that employees get a discount and that senior citizens get a 15% discount. "They can badge charge, they don't have to leave the hospital for lunch."

The café has certainly been popular. Fussell said they served more than 430,000 meals last year, and



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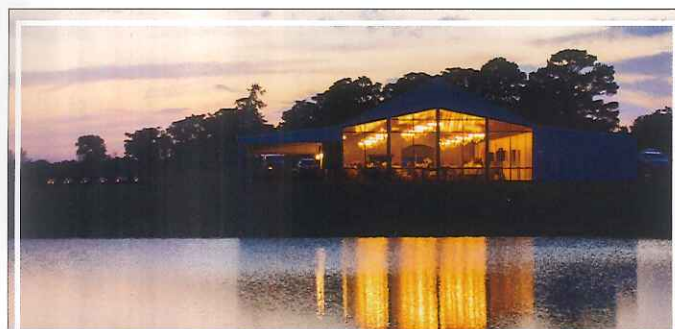
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*Photos courtesy of Stephanie Dunn King Photography*

**BEAN & BISTRO**



**SERVICE WITH A SMILE:** Café 870 is open weekdays for breakfast 6:30 to 9 a.m., weekdays and Sundays for lunch 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The bistro is open Monday – Thursday 6:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., Friday 6:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and Saturday – Sunday 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

they're on set to serve more in 2019.

They're not done, either. Fussell said MCSA plans to add a hot merchandiser where the café can offer hot sandwiches and hot pizza made in-house, so individuals can grab food and go.

She noted that, for patients, the hospital staff informs nutrition staff about any patient dietary restrictions, adding the café can cater to a wide variety of dietary needs.

"People today are more health conscious," she said, reflecting on her 30-plus years at the hospital. "I think that's changed. Back in the day, you'd never heard of a gluten-free diet. If a person comes into the café and say they're on the Keto diet, we can do a meal for them."

Burke, who has eaten vegetarian and vegan in the past, said he knows how difficult it can be to find quality food that meets your diet.

"I understand the struggles of going somewhere to get something to eat [when you're on a diet]; you usually have to prepare everything at home and put all this time into it," he said, noting that he plans to soon incorporate the Beyond Meat brand for vegetarian burgers. "When you make that transition, you're transitioning from going to places to get something to eat. I want to make sure people who are searching can come and enjoy food here." 