

WANTED: Chefs

Paducah, Ky.'s Artist Relocation Program includes chefs *by Robert J. Benes*

At a time when funding for the arts is constantly being cut, Paducah, Ky., has established an environment where artists and the arts are flourishing. Paducah's Artist Relocation Program was started in August of 2000, and is now a national model for using the arts for economic development—which includes seeing the influx of chefs and restaurateurs.

The town is divided into two parts. First there's Lowertown, home of the Artist Relocation Program, the oldest neighborhood in the city and just four blocks from the Ohio River and Downtown. In addition to artists, chefs from all over the country are deciding to relocate to Paducah. With the abundance of artists, tourism is booming in this town and that means hungry patrons, which also means there's a need for all kinds of eateries.

Lowertown already has a variety of places that satisfy hungry appetites, from Southern-style authentic Ken-

tucky vittles, to private dining, to coffee shops and delis. But town officials want more restaurants to open and are willing to work with chefs in relocating to Paducah, which includes offering qualified chefs financial and tax incentives and other reimbursements.

In addition to Lowertown, there's Downtown. Like many small towns around the country, when the big shopping malls opened up on the outskirts of town, their downtowns were devastated and many have never recovered. The difference between Paducah and many of these other towns was their vision and love of the arts. Paducah is now fast becoming the newest cultural destination in the country, and those plans include independent restaurant development.

Other area attractions that keep tourism high year-round is Paducah's well-established cultural community, which includes the Market House Museum, Museum of the

American Quilters, Yeiser Art Center, Paducah Film Society, Paducah Symphony Orchestra, Market House Theatre, Community Concert Series and Maiden Alley Cinema with its yearly film festival. Also, the town has a \$44 million performing arts center located downtown at the expanding Paducah riverfront project.

Denise Gordon, owner/chef of Café Minou, who earned a culinary degree from Johnson & Wales in Providence, R.I., says owning property was made easy with help from the city of Paducah and The Paducah Bank, "which has pumped a lot of money into Lowertown. For people who are credit worthy, they could be eligible for 100-percent financing with no money down from the bank."

She explains Paducah is an untapped culinary market (she's currently the only full-service restaurant in Lowertown), where eating is a very



Owner/chef Denise Gordon of Café Minou says Paducah is an untapped culinary market.

popular activity among locals and tourists. "You can do all kinds of food in Paducah, because people are searching for variety. Many people from Paducah will drive an hour or more to find places to eat because they can't kind find a wide variety here.

"Paducah is wonderful place to expand one's restaurant business," she continues.

If you're interested in learning more about Paducah and its relocation incentives, visit www.paducaharts.com.

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