

Round Barn pivots to meet community need during Covid-19 pandemic



When Jim and Kim Donahue purchased the Round Barn Farm in 2014 they were eager to build on the property's great reputation and update it as well. They spent their first five years doing just that.

Last fall they took their next steps when they hired Sean Richards, a Vermont native with a deep bench of restaurant and hospitality experience. He returned to Vermont from Tennessee where he was the chef at the renowned Blackberry Farm.



Kim and Jim Donahue.

"The core of his ethos is community and that is aligned with our mission to be a good neighbor, which means sourcing almost everything for our events and culinary offerings locally," Kim Donahue said.

"We felt compelled to invite our neighbors to our house in an intimate setting," she said, explaining the new Farmhouse Dinners that the

Round Barn began offering on the weekends in February as part of the process of redesigning events and culinary offerings.

The Donahues and staff were thrilled to be able to fill the dining room with their neighbors and found it very satisfying to have Tom and Kathy Mehuron sitting across the room from Sean and Karen Lawson and Julie and Paul Burns.

Then COVID-19 hit, inns and lodges were closed, and they pivoted immediately to offering take-out after setting up a pantry for their employees' needs to be met.

"Feeding people has always been my great desire and we felt there would be people in our community who might be having a hard time getting out for supplies or executing supper seven times a week. That, coupled with Sean's desire to be part of this community, led to our Feed 4 for \$40 Suppers," she said.





The family meals are being created by chef Richards with help from their baker, Astrid O'Connor, and Donahue's son, Alex Esarco, who has been volunteering to help. Kim Donahue handles the distribution and digital details of the operation.

Concerned that \$40 might be out of reach for some community members, they began working with the Mad River Valley Community Fund to create vouchers for local families who might have been lost somewhere between programs at the local food shelf and Meals On Wheels.

The voucher program allows recipients complete anonymity when using the coupons, which was important to the Donahues and their staff.

"We think that's key. It keeps us all equal," Kim Donahue added.

Look for the Round Barn to add new services for the community through this crisis and beyond. They'll have a special Mother's Day supper in addition to ways for the community to enjoy the warm spring and summer holidays, either at home or on The Round Barn Farm lawn once guidelines are loosened.

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Food photos courtesy The Inn at Round Barn Farm.

