EDWINS

Leadership & Restaurant Institute

2016 Press Kit

13101 Shaker Square  Cleveland, OH 44120  216-921-3333
OUR MISSION: To Change the Face of Recidivism

EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute is a proven successful mix of award-winning French cuisine, and top-tier table service combined with a unique and revolutionary social cause. EDWINS is the only white tablecloth restaurant in the country whose staff consists entirely of formerly incarcerated men and women in both the kitchen and the front of house.

Envisioned and established by Brandon Chrostowski in 2007, the organization is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit whose mission is to give formerly incarcerated individuals a foundation in the hospitality industry while providing a support network necessary for successful re-entry to life outside of prison. Individuals are not only equipped with basic culinary skills, but are also assisted with finding employment, housing, basic medical care, clothing, job coaching and literacy programs. The restaurant opened in Cleveland’s Shaker Square neighborhood in 2013.

Together with local non-profits, community leaders in the legal and judicial system and with hundreds of other civic Samaritans offering their moral currency to see this concept succeed, EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute has proven that second chances exist and the ability to change lives is possible.
Every human being regardless of their past has the right to a fair and equal future”

~ Brandon E. Chrostowski

Brandon Chrostowski’s passion for fine dining began as a teenager. Since then, he’s worked at some of the finest restaurants in the world, including Chanterelle in New York City and Lucas Carton, a Michelin 3-star restaurant in Paris.

He’s parlayed that enthusiasm -- and a second chance he received early in his life -- into his current passion, EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute.

At 18, Chrostowski was arrested for fleeing authorities when they came to break up a gathering involving drugs in suburban Detroit. He spent several days in jail awaiting his arraignment. The judge, instead of sentencing Chrostowski to up to 10 years in prison, granted him probation if he found a job. Chrostowski became a busboy at a local fine-dining restaurant in downtown Detroit.

That piqued his curiosity about a culinary career.

He attended the renowned Culinary Institute of America, where he received an Associate’s degree in Culinary Arts and a Bachelor’s degree in Business and Restaurant Management.

He apprenticed at Chicago’s legendary Charlie Trotters restaurant and later worked at Paris’ Lucas Carton. Those experiences drew Chrostowski into the fascinating world of French cuisine.

Since then, he’s worked as a Chef de Partie at Le Cirque and a saucier at Picholone, both in New York City. He then left the city and the kitchen to gain experience in the front-of-the-house at Le Pavilion, a restaurant in upstate New York owned and operated by his former CIA instructor, Claude Guermont.

He returned to NYC, where he became a sommelier at Chanterelle, a New York Times and James Beard award-winning restaurant.

In 2008, Chrostowski arrived in Cleveland to work as a general manager at acclaimed brasserie, L’Albatros. Here, his dream of providing others with the second chance he received as a youth began to take shape.

In 2013, he opened EDWINS, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to teaching formerly incarcerated adults a skilled trade in the culinary arts and more importantly, preparing them for a successful transition into the world of business.
Chrostowski has raised more than 6 million dollars for this effort. In 2016, he opened a 3-building campus near his Shaker Square restaurant and institute in Cleveland. Here, EDWINS students can live, work and learn in a supportive, affordable environment.

In addition, he runs a program in Northeast Ohio prisons that provide training in culinary arts and hospitality. Graduates are placed in local restaurants in Cleveland and its suburbs.

His awards include: the 2016 Frank J. Battisti Memorial Award, Volunteer of the Year from Grafton Correctional Institute; 2015 Medical Mutual Pillar Award, recognizing the outstanding director of the year; the 2015 Richard J. Cornuelle Award from the Manhattan Institute, which recognizes new ideas led by social innovators among others; and the 2016 CNN Hero Award.

Chrostowski lives in Cleveland with his wife and young son.
**OUR EXECUTIVE TEAM**

**Chris Terry, Executive Chef:** Trained at The Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, Chris Terry has held positions such as Chef de Cuisine of Audubon’s Restaurant inside the acclaimed Gateway Hotel and Conference Center, at The Naples Beach Hotel and Conference Center in Florida, at Blue Canyon in Twinsburg, Ohio and most recently as part of the team that opened L’Albatros Brasserie in Cleveland. His childhood spent in California and Iowa drives his passion for fresh, sustainable ingredients paired with a sophisticated palate and unrivaled passion for food.

**Gerry Grim, Director of Culinary Arts:** A graduate of Le Cordon Bleu, Sous Chef Gerry Grim brings more than a decade of experience to EDWINS having held positions at Duquesne Club in Pittsburgh and Fire Food and Drink in Cleveland. His passion for classical French cuisine groomed from his time at Duquesne Club and later mastering management of a fully-from-scratch kitchen at Fire drives his desire to harness the best of flavors inspired by local, sustainable products.

**Jordan Levine, General Manager:** Having worked in the industry since he was 16 as a dish washer, baker and cook, Jordan is keenly aware of all facets of creating a seamless dance from back-of-house to front, and an unparalleled dining experience for guests. His experience in service at Moxie and Red restaurant group in Beachwood and at L’Albatros Brasserie have honed his expertise in providing and teaching the fundamentals of formal dining to EDWINS students.

**Jon Khanna, Director of Education:** After earning a bachelor’s degree in Hospitality Management from Ohio State University, Jon began his career in the restaurant business. His love of fine dining and food started as a young boy while traveling through the States and Europe with his family. He had a particular liking for French food and the open air markets of Paris and Provence. Jon’s first job in the industry was at Sarava as a busser, then expeditor, assistant manager and then general manager. EDWINS is a perfect fit for him as he enjoys teaching and mentoring, along with the restaurant’s emphasis on fine French dining. In his free time Jon enjoys golfing, traveling and entertaining family and friends.
Kelvin Bailey is a poissonier line cook at Pier W, a landmark fine dining restaurant in Cleveland. After graduating from EDWINS in 2015, Kelvin completed an apprenticeship at Red/Moxie, an award-winning Cleveland steakhouse. Kelvin’s daily experience at Pier W includes working with Cleveland’s “best and freshest” seafood while learning the intricacies of quality sourcing from the restaurant’s fishermen and executive chef.

Kelvin serves as an inspiration to EDWINS students, often returning to offer encouragement and advice about life after EDWINS.

Alvin Harris, Line Chef, Butcher and the Brewer, Cleveland, Ohio

In 2014, Alvin Harris began his culinary path at EDWINS as part of the first graduating class. He quickly realized his passion for culinary arts listening to Brandon Chrostowski’s inspiring lecture on French wines.

After a successful apprenticeship at Hodges restaurant in downtown Cleveland, Alvin joined their staff as a line cook. He’s since moved to Butcher and the Brewer, another leading Cleveland restaurant to work as a line chef. Alvin is currently earning his Sommelier certification.
FACT SHEET

Since opening the restaurant in fall 2013, EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute, a non-profit organization, has:

- Placed more than 100 graduates in jobs with a Zero Percent recidivism rate
- Graduated more than 51 students from the EDWINS educational program at Ohio’s Grafton Correctional Institution (est. 2011)
- Raised more than $3.2 million from individuals and foundations
- Earned more than $3 million in gross revenue from its restaurant
- Built a $1 million student housing campus, which is home of the EDWINS Second Chance Life Skills Center
- Developed a curriculum, video, lesson plans and textbooks that are available in all 30 Ohio prisons
- Placed its graduates as interns and employees at dozens of top restaurants nationwide, including Grace (Chicago), Formaggio Kitchen (Cambridge, MA), GT Fish & Oyster (Chicago), The Greenhouse Tavern (Cleveland, OH) and Pier W (Cleveland, OH), as well as at cooking institutions in Normandy, France
- Built a strong reputation in the restaurant and hospitality industries: There is a list of more than 40 restaurants that seek to employ EDWINS graduates
- Earned the Manhattan Institute’s prestigious national Ricard J. Cornuelle Award for Social Entrepreneurship
- Earned its founder, Brandon Chrostowski, the internationally recognized 2016 CNN Hero award
- Received recognition as one of the top dining destinations in Cleveland’s growing food scene, according to the Cleveland Plain Dealer, Cleveland Scene and Cleveland Magazine

Re-entry & Recidivism

- Each year, more than 2 million adults in the United States are imprisoned, according to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics. That’s about 1 in 110 adults in America. In Ohio, about 50,000 people annually are incarcerated.
- When these prisoners are released — 650,000 nationally and 20,000 in Ohio each year -- they face a host of challenges, including finding someone who will hire them.
- More than 77.7 million (1 in 3) individuals have been touched by the criminal justice system.
- Within three years of release, about two-thirds (67.8 percent) of released prisoners are rearrested.
- Within five years of release, about three-quarters (76.6 percent) of released prisoners are rearrested.
- Of those prisoners rearrested, more than half (56.7 percent) are arrested by the end of the first year.

The Growing Restaurant & Hospitality Industry

- In the U.S., the restaurant and hospitality industry is the nation’s second-largest private-sector employer.
- Ohio’s restaurants have more than $16 billion in annual sales.
- Nearly 525,000 Ohioans are employed by the hospitality industry – a number that is expected to increase by 5 percent over the next decade.
- Cleveland is expected to add 6,000 new hospitality industry jobs by 2022.

For more information and resources, visit www.edwinsrestaurant.org
How EDWINS Puts Formerly Incarcerated People to Work

EDWINS has established a structured educational program that provides graduates with job skills in the culinary and hospitality industries and helps provide the foundation for a long-term career.

EDWINS’ students learn in an environment of security and stability with access to re-entry services provided by EDWINS’ community partners. At graduation, they receive job placement assistance. More than 90 percent of EDWINS’ graduates have been placed.

How does EDWINS do it?

1. Students apply to Passages, Inc., a local non-profit organization, and are referred to EDWINS.
2. Students interview at the restaurant, with more than 90 percent of applicants being accepted; no student is ever turned away due to space/capacity.
3. EDWINS provides six months of intensive training in food safety and preparation, food service, and hospitality modeled on the curriculum taught at The Culinary Institute of America.
4. EDWINS collaborates with existing community re-entry organizations to provide students with support services.
5. EDWINS provides monthly cash stipends to students who are meeting the rigorous performance standards utilized in the training program.
6. EDWINS provides student housing at the EDWINS Second Chance Life Skills Center.
7. EDWINS exposes its students to experienced industry specialists, teachers, mentors, and potential employers.
8. EDWINS students are placed at leading restaurants in greater Cleveland and also intern at top restaurants nationwide.

THE EDWINS MODEL
EDWINS is one of Cleveland’s top culinary destinations, boasting a delightful menu of expertly prepared French fare. The restaurant cultivates direct partnerships with independent farmers, and maintains a commitment to fresh, quality ingredients. The culinary team at EDWINS creates an array of award winning, seasonal offerings that highlight the best in nouvelle French cuisine:

**OUR CUISINE: NOUVELLE FRENCH**

Horseradish encrusted salmon with cucumbers and crème fraîche

Portobello Napoleon with roasted red pepper, grilled squash and zucchini, roasted cauliflower and red pepper coulis

Market fish wrapped in crispy potatoes with haricot verts and beurre rouge

Roasted chicken, vegetables and Rosemary demi-glace
OUR CUISINE: NOUVELLE FRENCH

SAMPLE MENU*

Tarte de lapin au Parmesan et jambon en croûte
Rabbit pie with Parmesan and prosciutto crust

Cuisses de grenouilles en persillade
Frog legs, garlic, parsley and butter

Escargots de Bourgogne
Burgundy snails with garlic, butter and parsley

V. Pâtes Ditalini au fromage de Fontina
Ditalini pasta with green onions, garlic and Fontina cheese

Salade mélangée au fromage de chèvre McKenzie crèmerie et ses poires pochées en vinaigrette au Champagne
V. Warm McKenzie Creamery goat cheese, mixed field greens, poached pears and Champagne vinaigrette

Steak au poivre et ses pommes frites
Black pepper encrusted Prime New York strip steak with a Cognac cream sauce, green peppercorns and fried potatoes

Escarole avec poivron rouge, haricot blanc, ail et huile d’olive
VN. Escarole with Cannellini beans, roasted red pepper, garlic and olive oil

Elixir avec jasmine sorbet
Chilled ginger and vanilla soup with tropical fruits and jasmine sorbet

Bleu Cheese Bread Pudding
with Pont L’Eveque cheese, Port - Balsamic reduction and beurre noisette

V. Vegetarian  VN. Vegan

*Current and seasonal menus available at www.edwinsrestaurant.org
EDWINS expanded its vast mission with the opening of EDWINS Second Chance Life Skills Center in September 2016. The new three-building campus in Cleveland’s Buckeye neighborhood provides housing, amenities and educational resources for current and former EDWINS students. Comprised of three classically painted buildings at the corner of South Moreland Ave. and Buckeye Rd, the 13-month project is a dramatic addition to an often forgotten neighborhood. View video of the property produced by Ohio’s Grafton Correctional Institution inmates.

The 20,000- square-foot property is a 5-minute walk from the critically acclaimed restaurant. It features a student dormitory, alumni house, fitness center, library, test kitchen and outdoor leisure activities. The alumni house offers housing options for recent graduates, with whom the barriers of renting a home are still present.

The amenities comprising the main building include fitness equipment, full locker room facilities, offices and a test kitchen where students can hone their skills in classic French cuisine. Students may also visit the library and utilize several computers, participate in online courses and view digital tutorials created by the EDWINS educational team.

EDWINS Second Chance Life Skills Center is committed to keeping students engrained in culinary culture. The new campus features a large collection of Italian honeybees housed on a rooftop. The bees are harvested for use in several of the restaurant’s dishes. The rear of the property also boasts a small greenhouse and chicken pens.

A colorful mural created by popular Cleveland artist Bob Peck overlooks outdoor recreation facilities and a basketball court.

EDWINS Second Chance Life Skills Center is the second chapter of a massive plan to change the face of re-entry, while simultaneously affecting the Buckeye neighborhood. The organization plans to purchase surrounding buildings to create butcher and fish shops. Students will learn to break down whole animals while providing a new neighborhood resource. EDWINS aims to become one of the strongest culinary institutes in the United States.

The project, though met with opposition from traditional housing groups, has become a community effort. EDWINS purchased the buildings in July 2015 by collaborating with neighborhood leaders hopeful for a bright new addition to the Buckeye neighborhood. With support from local and national chefs, demolition and construction manpower, legal organizations, furniture donations and more, the swift campus completion is due in part to their collaboration.

To follow progress of the EDWINS Second Chance Life Skills Center, visit www.edwinsrestaurant.org
“Chrostowski has assembled a team of professionals who not only lead the enterprise, but train and engage those who participate.”

~ October 22, 2013

“Authentic French food is rare enough on the shores of Lake Erie. But when it opens on Friday, Nov. 1, EDWINS will also be the first restaurant in Cleveland -- and, apparently, in the U.S. -- specifically created and designed to employ individuals who have been sentenced for crimes and in most cases served prison time.”

~ February 13, 2014

“Chrostowski calls the vibe French Industrial, and the decor mixes Warhol-esque portrait art with a vintage wooden host stand, purple velvet curtains and exposed brick. It feels lush and just a little bit gritty, which perhaps is apropos.”

~ July 2014

“It’s easy to root for EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute.”

~ July 2015
“[EDWINS] is turning out fantastic food like lobster bisque, rabbit tart, frog legs, horseradish-crusted salmon medallions atop cool cucumbers in a tangy crème fraiche, braised leg of rabbit with sweet potato puree, crisp duck leg confit with mushroom risotto, and steak au poivre.”

~December 19, 2013

That what began as a goal Brandon set for himself while working in a bistro in Tribeca has actually come to fruition says a great deal both about Chrostowski’s vision and his drive. It also says much for what turned out to be the fertile public-spiritedness, philanthropic, and volunteer culture of Cleveland, the city to which Chrostowski chose to move in 2007 for the sole reason that its city schools’ high school graduation rate was among the lowest in the nation. It seemed, in other words, to be a place where the project he envisioned would be needed.

~ September 2015

“EDWINS isn’t just about giving inmates a new life. It’s also about providing an exquisite dining experience.

~ October 31, 2014
EDWINS Restaurant Opens at Shaker Square

Brandon Chrostowski debuts “industrial French” menu and dining with a cause

CLEVELAND, OHIO (Oct. 18, 2013) — When EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute opens its doors at Shaker Square Nov. 1, it will not only be the opening of a chic new dining spot with classic French cuisine but also the culmination of a dream for its founder and CEO, Brandon Chrostowski.

The accomplished chef, sommelier and former GM of L’Albatros has created a new gem in the Cleveland dining scene. He has also creating a learning environment for previously incarcerated citizens returning to the community. EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute is a 501(c)3 non-profit whose mission is to give these returning citizens a foundation in the hospitality industry while providing a support network necessary for successful re-entry to life outside prison.

EDWINS is equal parts learning academy and bright new dining venue serving classic French food combined with a mid-western sensibility. The menu boasts such classics as steak au poivre with green peppercorn sauce, salad niçoise and of course, crème brûlée for dessert; But there’s also some wonderful culinary departures, such as a rabbit pie with a parmesan and prosciutto crust, roasted venison with chestnuts, spaetzle, and braised cabbage and a salad of mixed field greens with warm McKenzie Creamery goat cheese, figs, pears and a champagne vinaigrette.

The vibe in the newly refurbished space formerly occupied by the defunct Grotto, is sleek and sophisticated with a Parisian style, yet still welcoming and without pretension. Repainted walls in deep blue slate, vintage art nouveau posters, luscious suede banquettes and a cozy fireplace all make you feel like you’ve just stepped off the Rue Chambon for a quick bite after shopping.

This new establishment is an unlikely mix of classic cuisine, top-tier table service, and a very worthy social cause. EDWINS will be the only white table cloth restaurant in the country to employ formerly incarcerated employees in the kitchen and the “front of the house” for service. The endeavor is supported by a host of local foundations and donors who believe in EDWINS’ mission. They include Social Venture Partners, The Abington Foundation, The Fowler Family Foundation, The Cleveland Foundation and St. Luke’s Foundation (see fact sheet for complete list of donors).

EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute is located at 13013 Shaker Square Cleveland, OH 44120; Telephone 216-921-3333; www.edwinsrestaurant.org. Hours of restaurant operation are Monday through Wednesday 4:00 pm until 10pm; Thursday through Saturday 4:00pm until 11:30pm. Reservations suggested.

For more information about EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute, visit these social media sites: www.facebook.com/edwinsCLE; www.twitter.com/edwinsCLE; and www.instagram.com/edwinsCLE.

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Prison gave me a recipe for freedom

By Brandon Chrostowski

July 2014

CLEVELAND--I am a chef, a sommelier, and a fromager that has studied and prepared meals from Le Cirque in New York to Lucas Carton in Paris. But my real journey began in a county jail cell and continues through a culinary “re-entry” Institute I have founded here in Northeast Ohio.

No matter what I’m preparing, matching, or presenting to my guests, I never forget the day I all but lost my freedom to even think about food, feasting, or helping others to rehabilitate themselves. I stood before the bench, my fate dangling in the space between the man in robes and me.

I studied the face of the judge like a person studies a menu. Yet it was not a question of how good and appetizing something might be, nor was I free to choose or delight in anything. My life was a cold lump upon his plate. Having spent time incarcerated while waiting for this verdict, I was just hungry for life.

The contempt and distaste he saw in me was only a reflection of my own self-loathing. I had already made many of the wrong choices a young man could make and stood by, my stomach hollow, my shoulders sagged, my soul malnourished by sinfulness and regret. Statistically, I was just another Detroit drug offender.

The judge was merciful and I was given the chance to train and work with a local chef. Over time, I was able to re-orient not only myself but, with a nod from providence, now help others transition from the bitter taste of prison to the release of creative cooking. I became as fascinated by the rewarding pairing of wine with cheese as I am committed to the pairing of repentant men and the healing therapy of the culinary arts.

People emerging from prison do not automatically deserve dessert, but they certainly warrant a chance for an entrée of life. After my brush with the law, I traveled from New York and throughout Europe. Although I earned skills and degrees from prestigious culinary institutions, my real destination was my own inner self.

I developed an appetite for helping people re-enter society with the ingredients of dignity and inspiration. Having been brushed by confinement, I choose now to teach the previously confined all about hospitality, literacy, self-respect, hygiene, housing, and the uncommon satisfaction of filling the holes in other people’s bodies and souls.

I’m not giving it away; I’m just offering them a different kind of option. They are charged with the unique opportunity to nourish others in a challenging, edifying setting. In my restaurant and Institute, these individuals are not relegated to busboys and laundry hands: they are sous-chefs and maître-des. I got a second chance, so they should as well.

And yet, this is not all just fanciful reflection or a matter of nonstop contrition. I am not simply using good food to obscure the real issues of prison, re-entry, and reformation. There is a way to change the face of re-entry and it needs to arrive through education on all levels and reason for prison rather than the status quo of talking about the reasons for prison. So here are some of the facts that lead my colleagues and me to maintain our Institute for returning citizens who can benefit from being skilled, not sidelined.

In Ohio, for example, at any moment, 50,000 people are in prison; about 20,000 are released. Almost a quarter of these individuals re-enter society in Cuyahoga County. Then the arithmetic gets very bad: Within three years, one-third of these folks are back in penitentiaries. Meanwhile, the state is spending $1.3 billion on maintaining these prisons. I
learned that the restaurant and hospitality industry is the nation’s second-largest private sector employer and registers over $16 billion in yearly sales.

We have to build a bridge between prison spending and commercial growth; between the degradation of troubled human beings and the liberation of the hospitality culture. Not every criminal deserves this but every offender is a person. We should begin with implementing a six-month pre-release program in prisons nationwide, which is already in effect in Ohio. We should assist interested business in setting up a six-month post-release plan—this will fortify and enhance successful re-entry. We must establish a central data base to check for outstanding warrants and fines. A proactive, fair system for our returning citizens is essential. We can parse souls and give the right ones an opportunity to serve others while servicing their own humanity.

This program, known as the EDWINS Institute, is working. We have no illusions that we are going to repair the national penal system (a known failure) but have already proven that we can rehabilitate a number of people through education, employment, trust, and an environment of security and stability that contravenes everything that is wrong in the prison culture. Who could argue, in a nation so afflicted with judicial cataclysm that offering a career path to someone is not preferable to an almost reflexive path back to lockup and despair?

Whenever possible, let them serve meals rather than serve more time.

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Brandon Chrostowski is Founder & CEO of EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute and a renowned restaurateur and chef.

EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute in Cleveland, Ohio is a unique approach to giving formerly-incarcerated adults a foundation in the hospitality industry while providing a support network necessary for a successful reentry to the community. EDWIN’s goal is to enhance the community of Cleveland’s vulnerable neighborhoods by providing its future leaders. Our mission is to teach a skilled trade in the culinary arts, empower willing minds through passion for the hospitality industry and prepare students for a successful transition into the world of business professionals.

For more information, visit www.edwinsrestaurant.org
Our future chefs must walk safely home

By: Brandon E. Chrostowski

November 2015

He was young man who was never convicted of any felony but then effectively suffered the death penalty. Like many of us, he had a complicated past but he was walking tall and creating a bright future for himself. His name was Brian and his blood cries out to me: why was yet another aspiring, hopeful person simply snuffed out from this life?

Brian, only 31, was an energetic, upbeat, and talented student in our education and rehabilitation program at EDWINS Leadership and Restaurant Institute. There was hope in his eyes. We celebrated his gentle, giving spirit and his adoration for family and friends. His mother adored him for choosing this path. He emitted a joy in cooking that would make even a hardened French chef smile—he was the embodiment of our Second Chance program.

He was randomly murdered one recent night while making his way home. So now he is another cold statistic when he would have liked to make us a warm meal. He is also a paradigm of the susceptibility of countless human beings that are working hard to start over and simply need our encouragement and help.

EDWINS is tailored for someone ready to work hard and rebuild their life. But all too often there are predators and barriers that prevent dreams from coming to fruition. And it’s increasingly more difficult after going to prison.

Incarceration is more than a word you read in the newspaper or hear on television. It is a grim reality, often deserved, that affects people in ways unimaginable to those of us “on the outside.” We are good at throwing people behind bars; how good are we at helping them re-enter society when they have satisfactorily earned their release?

We have been asking this question and our supporters agree there must be a response to re-entry that effectively reconfigures the lives of former inmates. This society accedes to their anonymous suffering, offering only ambivalence at best and opportunism at worst. They may have deserved a jail sentence. They certainly deserve a second chance. Like Brian, they all merit the right to walk home safely.

No one is arguing that a majority of prisoners have been thrown into this situation because they committed crimes. But we are concerned that—once these men and women have done their time—they are thrust into a whole new category of vulnerability. The community disdains them and won’t retrain them. Too often, society takes advantage of their inexperience and naïveté.

There are various street hustles and scams; I’ve even seen a professional organization in Cleveland offer “help” only to benefit their funding stream, a new form of victimization. People who have been confined don’t always have the ability or experience to know when they are being maneuvered.

American history itself has proven to us that this kind of cynical manipulation of recidivists is bad for everyone and all of us. We all know that Abraham Lincoln freed the Southern slaves via the Emancipation Proclamation during the Civil War. What we don’t all know is that this amounted to a paper gesture.
The liberated slaves were given neither education nor training of any kind. They were on their own in a society that freed them but didn’t provide access to housing, work, or legal equality. They were left to their own wits and thereby became ready quarry for plundering bosses, land owners, and carpetbaggers. The result was a hundred years of the Jim Crow culture of segregation, lynching, and a still-brimming racial divide.

Now is the time to consider that one of most flagrant areas of American social depravation has to do with something we don’t normally see: the dark hole in our society into which newly discharged prisoners—people who’ve done their time—fall into and disappear.

This vicious cycle is as bad for our country as it is for the people trying to reenter the national work force. We have to buffer them against scams and diversions created by bureaucratic funding puzzles. We must give them a healthy transition. We must remember that new beginnings are hard; we have to shield them from greedy people who actually exploit their dependence to push them into hopeless scams camouflaged as jobs and opportunities.

Brian was a winner; we owe it to him to let the others make it safely through the night and aware as they rebuild their life.

Brandon Chrostowski is Founder & CEO of EDWINS Leadership & Restaurant Institute and a renowned restaurateur and chef.

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For more information, visit www.edwinsrestaurant.org
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- Fire Food and Drink (Cleveland, OH)
- Mitchell’s Ice Cream (Cleveland, OH)
- Grace (Chicago, IL)
- Formaggio Kitchen (Cambridge, MA)
- More than 30 leading restaurants currently willing to hire EDWINS graduates