

eat up

COLUMBUS

August 8, 2026

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tonight at a glance

6:00 PM **WELCOME + SOCIAL HOUR**

Kick off the evening with cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, live music, and the silent auction.

Live Music: Honey + Blue

7:15 PM **GATHER TOGETHER**

Kick off the evening with cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, live music, and the silent auction.

Welcome: Sophia Fifner, Emcee
Remarks: Paula Haines, CEO, Freedom a la Cart
Dinner: Featuring a menu by Chef BJ Lieberman, Chef Laurie Sargent, and Love Riley Cakes

8:30 PM **MAKE AN IMPACT**

Hear a powerful story of transformation before joining us in creating opportunities for survivors through our annual paddle raise.

Keynote: Lyndzy Donovan, Survivor Advocate, Freedom a la Cart Volunteer + Events Coordinator
Paddle Raise: Sarah Ahern, Freedom a la Cart Board President

9:00 PM **CELEBRATE**

Enjoy dessert from Love Riley Cakes, and continue celebrating with live music.

10:00 PM **GOODNIGHT**

If you won a silent auction package, please stop by the checkout area before you leave.

menu

FIRST COURSE

Rosemary and Sea Salt Focaccia

Whipped ricotta

Prepared by Chef BJ Lieberman

Freedom Life Salad

Mixed greens, dried berries, blue cheese crumbles, green onion, toasted rosemary pecans, and housemade herb-mustard vinaigrette

Prepared by Chef Laurie Sargent

SECOND COURSE

Summer Melon Gazpacho

GF, Vegan

THIRD COURSE

Miso-Glaed Turkey with Confit Onion Farrotto

BBQ Celery Root with Rice

GF, Vegan

DESSERT

Love Riley Cakes Selections

A selection of cupcakes, cinnamon vanilla cake donuts, and frosted sugar cookies

Sicilian Almond Cookies

GF, DF, Prepared by Freedom a la Cart

signature drinks

Bramble + Bloom

Gin, blackerry liqueur, lime, simple syrup

Freedom Fizz Mocktial

White cranberry peach juice, grapefruit juice, citrus syrup, sparkling water.

charcuterie

An artisan selection of specialty cured meats provided by Foris Extraordinary Meats, local and international cheeses, dried fruits, and thoughtfully chosen accompaniments.



emcee

Sophia Fifner

President + CEO of the Columbus Metropolitan Club
Creator of The Neighboring Gap™

Sophia Fifner, M.S., CFRE, is the creator of The Neighboring Gap™ and President & CEO of the Columbus Metropolitan Club, one of the nation's leading civic forums, where she convenes leaders across every divide each week and secured the largest corporate investment in the Club's history.

For nearly two decades, from the U.S. Senate to a Fortune 500 corporate foundation, city government, and philanthropy where she has raised and stewarded more than $470 million, she kept seeing the same thing: good strategy, real intention, and still, no trust. The solutions kept getting bigger; the gap kept growing. She realized we weren't missing a better program, we'd forgotten how to be neighbors.

Today she helps leaders and teams close that gap, making connection a learnable practice that retains people, bridges differences,, and gets things done. Her work pairs hard research (the Surgeon General, Gallup, Putnam) with a lived story that earns the room.



keynote speaker

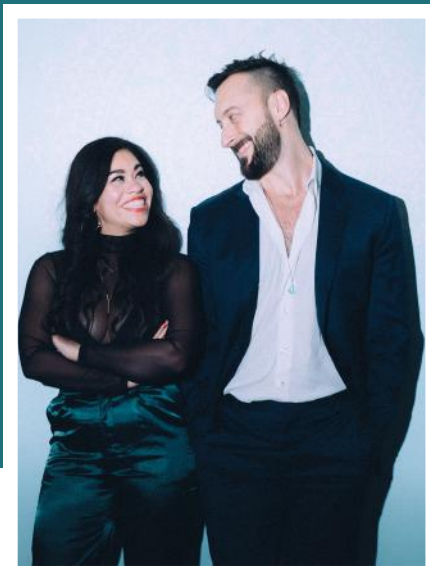
Lyndzy Donovan

Survivor Advocate, Volunteer + Events Coordinator, Freedom a la Cart

Lyndzy Donovan is the Volunteer and Events Coordinator at Freedom a la Cart, where she has the privilege of connecting volunteers, community partners, and survivors through meaningful opportunities to build hope and belonging.

Lyndzy is also a survivor leader and advocate. Her journey of healing has fueled her passion for advocacy, breaking stigma, and creating spaces where others feel seen, valued, and empowered. Through sharing her story, she hopes to inspire others to believe that healing is possible and that no past has the power to define a person's future.

Having first experienced Freedom a la Cart as a participant in its workforce development program, Lyndzy now works alongside the same organization that once believed in her, helping others find community, purpose, and pathways to lasting freedom. She is honored to share her story at Eat Up in celebration of the courage, resilience, and life-changing impact made possible through Freedom a la Cart and the generosity of this community.



Live music

Honey and Blue

Honey and Blue crafts cinematic soul music—where timeless melodies, vulnerable storytelling, and powerhouse harmonies meet. The Columbus, Ohio duo of Stephanie Amber and Adam Darling has spent more than a decade building a devoted following through unforgettable live performances and deeply personal songwriting.

Their music has taken them to stages alongside Aloe Blacc, Bettye LaVette, Charlie Hunter, Martha Wash, and Postmodern Jukebox, while appearances on ABC 6 Good Morning Columbus, PBS's Broad & High, and NPR.org have introduced their music to audiences nationwide. From intimate listening rooms to major festivals, Honey and Blue creates performances that are equal parts soulful concert, honest conversation, and shared experience.

Blending soul, pop, R&B, blues, and folk influences, Honey and Blue writes music that lingers long after the final note—connecting audiences through authenticity, warmth, and songs that feel both timeless and new.

our culinary team



BJ Lieberman

Chef/Owner, Ginger Rabbit Jazz Lounge and Metsi's Italian

Before opening Chapman's Eat Market, Chef BJ Lieberman served as Freedom a la Cart's interim head chef. A Culinary Institute of America graduate and two-time James Beard Award semifinalist, he has led acclaimed kitchens at Rose's Luxury, Little Pearl, and Husk.



Laurie Sargent

Chef, Director of Food + Beverage, Freedom a la Cart

A former culinary instructor, bakery owner, and private chef, Laurie now leads the café, bakery, and catering operations at Freedom a la Cart. For the past six years, she has built training programs that equip survivors of human trafficking with marketable skills, confidence, and hope.



Riley Harris

Owner, Love Riley Cakes

Riley Harris is the owner and founder of Love Riley a Columbus based bakery. She began the business in 2012 as a 13-year-old out of her parent's kitchen. Over a decade later she opened her Lewis Center brick and mortar in the spring of 2025 and is set to open her second location in Grandview Heights this summer.

AN EXCERPT FROM

They Don't Get to Write the Ending

Nicole S., Survivor

There was a time when I didn't know I was a victim.
If you had asked me then, I would have told you I was in love.

Because that is the part people don't understand.
Nobody wakes up one morning and volunteers to be abused.

It happens slowly.
So slowly you don't notice you're disappearing until one day you look in the mirror and can't recognize the person staring back at you.

What I lost wasn't just my freedom.
It was me.
My voice.
My confidence.
My dreams.
My ability to believe I deserved more.

The worst part wasn't always the abuse.
The worst part was believing I deserved it.

I wasn't staying because I loved the abuse.
I was staying because I loved the potential.
I was staying because I believed the lies.
I was staying because I was terrified.
And sometimes I was staying because I genuinely didn't think I could survive without them.

Not all chains are visible.
Some are made of fear.
Some are made of trauma.
Some are made of believing the world outside is scarier than the person hurting you.

And the hardest truth of all?
I loved my abuser.
Not because I was weak.
Not because I wanted the pain.
But because trauma creates bonds that don't make sense to people who have never lived through them.

Leaving wasn't one brave moment.
It was a thousand terrified moments.
It was grieving someone who was still alive.
It was mourning a future that never existed.

People talk about leaving like it's the end of the story.

For me, it was the beginning of the hardest chapter.

I had to learn that what happened to me was not love.
I had to learn that healing and surviving are not the same thing.
Surviving kept me alive.
Healing taught me how to live again.

Trafficking and exploitation do not always look the way people think they do.

Sometimes they look like a boyfriend.
A family member.
A trusted friend.

Sometimes they look so much like love that it takes years to realize it wasn't love at all.

So if you are hearing this and you are still trapped:

You are not weak.
You are not hopeless.
You are not alone.
And your story does not have to end where it is right now.

I am living proof that healing is possible.
I am living proof that freedom is possible.
I am living proof that a victim can become a survivor.

My story did not end when someone hurt me.
My story began the moment I chose myself.

Today, I carry scars.
I carry grief.
But I also carry something stronger.

Hope.
Freedom.
Purpose.
And a voice that no longer shakes when it tells the truth.

They may have written the first chapters of my story.
But they do not get to write the ending.

I do.

And today, my ending looks a lot like freedom.

VIEW THE FULL VERISON









silent auction

Every Bid Makes an Impact

From dream vacations and chef experiences to local favorites and one-of-a-kind packages, every item in tonight's silent auction helps create opportunities for survivors.

Browse the full collection, place your bids, and keep an eye on your favorites throughout the evening.

The auction closes at 8:30 PM. Winning bidders may pick up their items at Auction Checkout before departing.

BROWSE + BID

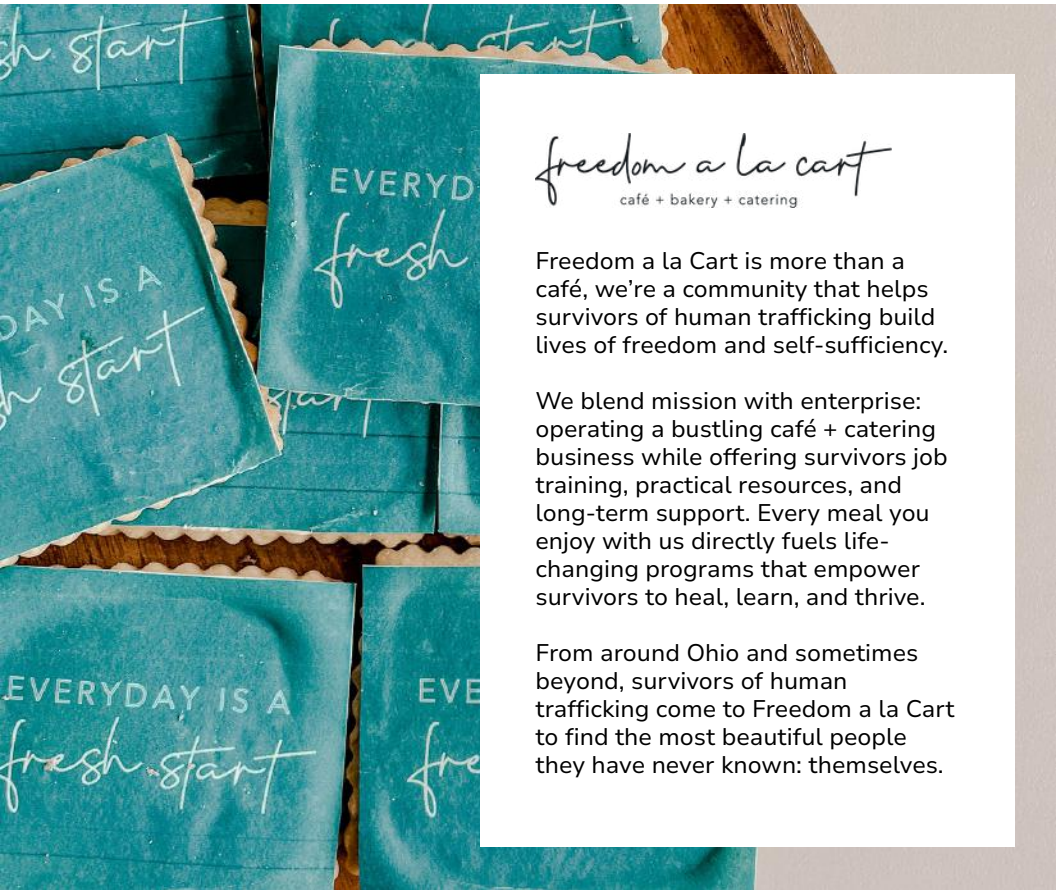
we need you

Be part of What Comes Next

Every gift helps provide survivors with the support, resources, and opportunities they need to move toward lasting independence.

No amount is too small to make a difference.

CLICK TO DONATE



freedom a la cart
café + bakery + catering

Freedom a la Cart is more than a café, we're a community that helps survivors of human trafficking build lives of freedom and self-sufficiency.

We blend mission with enterprise: operating a bustling café + catering business while offering survivors job training, practical resources, and long-term support. Every meal you enjoy with us directly fuels life-changing programs that empower survivors to heal, learn, and thrive.

From around Ohio and sometimes beyond, survivors of human trafficking come to Freedom a la Cart to find the most beautiful people they have never known: themselves.

a community of leaders

Behind every unforgettable evening is a community of people committed to creating opportunities for survivors.

We're grateful for their leadership and support.

2026 Event Committee

CO-CHAIR
Megumi Robinson

CO-CHAIR
George Stevens

Jim Cushing
Lyndzy Donovan
Katie Kettlehake
BJ Lieberman

Jennifer Nodjak
Sarah Perkins
Kathy Sherry
Andrea Wilkins

Freedom Board of Directors

Sarah Ahern
Board President, PATH

Amy Becker
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Cathy King
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Cultural Strategist + Development Consultant

Joyce McKinniss
Board Secretary, Jones Day

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Megumi Robinson
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Thank You to our In-Kind Sponsors

Berwick, Brenz Pizza, Crimson Cup, Foris Meats, Ginger Rabbit, Love Riley Cakes, Meadowlark, Metsi's, Petals that Inspire, Style Amplified, and The Bloom Shoppe.



MGF SOURCING

MAKING GREAT FASHION™

MGF Sourcing is a global sourcing company that specializes in fashion apparel and related goods. We have over 40 years of experience and take pride in our ethical standards and caring approach.

At MGF Sourcing, we believe in the power of passion, inclusion, service, integrity, and freedom. That's why we are proud to support Freedom a la Cart, an organization that empowers survivors of human trafficking to rebuild their lives. We are inspired by Freedom a la Cart's vision of creating a pathway to freedom for every survivor.

We are honored to be part of their journey and look forward to our continued partnership.

DIAMOND HILL
A First Eagle Investments Company

Diamond Hill, a First Eagle Investments company, is a valuation-disciplined boutique asset manager focused on institutional-oriented investors. We are fiercely committed to generating excellent, long-term investment outcomes and building enduring partnerships. We offer investment strategies in four key asset classes—US equity, international equity, alternatives and fixed income—in vehicles that best meet our clients' needs.

Gordon®
FOOD SERVICE

For 128 years, Gordon Food Service employees, customers, and communities have worked together for good. It's why we stand today with Eat Up Columbus in the fight against human trafficking. Our 4,000-plus drivers are trained to recognize the signs of human exploitation and act as eyes and ears on the roads we travel in the United States and Canada. Helping trafficking survivors rebuild their lives is a force for good. We also believe in the power of good food to make moments special. Our catalog of products, services, and marketing capabilities can help your business stand out when it matters most. We salute Eat Up Columbus and Freedom a la Cart for their work.

TRINITY
FINANCIAL ADVISORS LLC

A few years ago, a client of ours introduced us to Freedom a la Cart and we are so glad she did. At Trinity, we like to 'invest' alongside our clients in organizations that matter to them. So we partnered with this client by becoming a sponsor of the EAT UP event. The more we learned about the organization, volunteers, mentors and the women they come alongside to help, the more appreciative we became and thankful for all the great work of Freedom a la Cart. It is our privilege to again be a sponsor for this year's event.



the impact continues

Visit the Café

Stop by Freedom a la Cart Café for breakfast or lunch. Every meal helps create opportunities for survivors while supporting a mission rooted in hope, dignity, and meaningful employment.ring brings people together while helping create opportunities for survivors with every order.

Order Catering

From office lunches to special celebrations, Freedom a la Cart Catering brings people together while helping create opportunities for survivors with every order.

Make a Gift

Your generosity helps provide paid workforce development, housing assistance, individualized support, and the resources survivors need to build lives of stability and independence.

Volunteer Your Time

Whether you have a few hours or want to get involved regularly, your time and talents can help create meaningful experiences for survivors and strengthen our community.

Stay Connected

Follow Freedom on social media (@freedomalacart) for inspiring stories, impact updates, café specials, and opportunities to get involved throughout the year.