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NEWS RELEASE

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Photos available—Download links and sample captions at end of release

Nicci Sylvester remembered with new FEAST! Local Foods Marketplace award

Rochester, MN – FEAST! Organizers launched a new award at the 2019 event last weekend in honor of a dedicated local foods champion, lost last year to cancer. The Nicci Sylvester Award was presented to Jennifer Becker and Erik Kleven of Bleu Duck Kitchen, and Tim Wiste of Tonic Local Kitchen and Juice Bar in recognition of their dedication to sourcing ingredients from local farms.

Local farmers have great things to say about both restaurants. Paul Wiens of Misty Meadows Farm said, "We were so pleased to see Tim and the rest of the Tonic team pick up after losing Nicci. They regularly buy our beef and always honor our arrangement for how we prefer to be paid, which is pretty important for small farmers like us. It's great that they can work with so many farmers in our area!"

Wiste, who had been Sylvester's business partner at Tonic, spoke about Nicci's dedication to local sourcing and her participation in the FEAST! Local Foods Network, for which she had volunteered, donated food, helped organize restaurant week and done cooking demos since its launch in 2014. Wiste said, "I remember when Nicci started the Tonic concept, she started by introducing herself to all of the farmers and vendors at the Rochester Farmers Market. From there she made lifetime friends and local sources for her fresh, handmade food.

In honor of Nicci and what she stood for, I would like to present this award to Jennifer and Erik at Bleu Duck."

Rochester Farmers Market vendor Andrew Serio of Serio Farms told Market manager Jess Joyce, "Bleu Duck has always been a great supporter of local grown product. They not only use fresh grown tomatoes and lettuce, but many of my products. I have seen many of my fellow vendors from the market at the restaurant. They are always happy to get the best product and make wonderful food."

Jonathan Stensgard with Pine Creek Farms said, "It has been a joy working with Bleu Duck and seeing all the interesting dishes they come up with using our produce!"

Mark Nelson of Rivers Edge Market Garden says, "Blue Duck Kitchen was one of the first restaurants to give us chance as a young upstart company, and our partnership has grown ever since."

Paul Schmidt of Schmidt Farm said, "Eric Kleven and crew are quality players in the local food scene. They have been customers of Schmidt Farm produce since they opened the doors."

After Wiste presented the award, FEAST! Tradeshaw coordinator Elena Byrne turned the tables and surprised him with his own Nicci Sylvester Award for the hard work and dedication he's put into keeping Tonic going in Nicci's absence.

Other awards presented at the annual FEAST! Event this past weekend were as follows:

Most Engaging Booth: Dani Dircks of Sailor Mercy (Stillwater, MN), who makes elderberry syrup.

Inspiring Social Benefit: John Petersen of Ferndale Market (Cannon Falls, MN), who donates turkeys during holidays among other times.

Innovative Local Sourcing: Layne Cozzolino of Siren Shrub Co. (Amherst Junction, WI), who creates each product flavor as a collaboration with a Wisconsin farmer who provides the key ingredient.

People's Choice Award: CannonBelles Cheese (Cannon Falls, MN), co-owned by Deeann Lufkin, Jackie Ohmann and Kathy Hupf, earned 10% of the public votes for favorite booth during the Saturday festival.

FEAST! Local Foods Marketplace is co-hosted by the [Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation](#) and [Renewing the Countryside](#) non-profit organizations and is supported with premier sponsorship by the [Minnesota Department of Agriculture](#).

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Photos and suggested captions:

Nicci Sylvester Award

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zcRNd7zJwyBmyvcQimtV0CbSgNBiMb2u/view?usp=sharing>

Sample caption:

Tim Wiste of Tonic Local Kitchen & Juice Bar presenting the Nicci Sylvester Award to Jennifer Becker and Erik Kleven of Bleu Duck Kitchen.

Photo: Ashley Aukes, Beruck Studios

Most Engaging Booth Award

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KwmiBNTKc5L_vflh53ScV9BXC1zEV_-5/view?usp=sharing

Sample caption:

Dani Dircks of Sailor Mercy (Stillwater, MN) receiving her "Most Engaging Booth" award at the FEAST! Tradeshow awards ceremony Friday, Dec. 6, 2019.

Photo: Ashley Aukes, Beruck Studios

FEAST! 2019 People's Choice Award

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rFeihW0q9lOAazMditsOQ4UvZjPoBCI/view?usp=sharing>

Sample caption:

Deeann Lufkin, Jackie Ohmann and Kathy Hupf pose with their FEAST! People's Choice Award at the FEAST! Festival Saturday, Dec. 7, 2019.

Photo: Ashley Aukes, Beruck Studios