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Free Rent for Lucky Startups Brings New Tastes to Food Halls

Chelsea Market to host Ethiopian eatery through arrangement with nonprofit Hot Bread Kitchen

By Charles Passy – May 23, 2019



In the trendy world of food halls, the newest twist is free rent for a handful of startups — giving novice restaurateurs a leg up in a tough business and the hall a source of fresh tastes.

Starting Friday, Chelsea Market will begin hosting Gorsha, a fast-casual outfit that specializes in Ethiopian food with a contemporary flair.

Chelsea Market, widely credited with jump-starting the food-hall trend, landed Gorsha through a deal with Hot Bread Kitchen, a nonprofit that provides training and low-cost kitchen-rental facilities to culinary entrepreneurs at its Harlem headquarters.

Under the arrangement, a string of vendors who have been through Hot Bread Kitchen's program will open a pop-up style residency at Chelsea Market.

Earlier this year, Urbanspace, a company that operates food halls and holiday markets throughout New York, launched a similar initiative at its location at 570 Lexington Ave.

Called Citi Test Kitchen and funded by Citigroup Inc., the program provided free space to a startup company selected through a competitive process—in this case, a vendor, called Bacchanal Sauce, which specializes in spicy Caribbean fare.

Ultimately, such initiatives can help a food-hall operator stand out, especially as the halls proliferate throughout the city, said Arlene Spiegel, a New York-based restaurant consultant.

“Considering all the competition now, the food halls want to get a glow,” she said. ●