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MEET THE VISIONARY BRINGING COCO TO THE GWENDOLYN – TAMARA LACKEY

What do a café, a nonprofit supporting children waiting for families and an animal sanctuary have in common? One passionate, driven entrepreneur making a difference in the lives of many — Tamara Lackey.

This summer, The Gwendolyn, a new Class-A office building in the Glen Lennox community, will welcome Tamara's latest venture, an upscale café called Coco. Conveniently located on the ground floor with ample outdoor space that seamlessly



flows into the interior's inviting ambiance, guests will be able to enjoy breakfast, lunch, dinner or happy hour there. Coco will offer a coffee espresso bar, baked goods and pastries, along with a full menu of dine-in comfort food, cocktails and mocktails. Bringing a casual gathering spot with a cool vibe to Glen Lennox isn't the only thing that is special about Coco — its menu is entirely plant-based.

“Plant-based foods are one of the fastest-growing food segments, and we're thrilled to be one of the few establishments in Chapel Hill dedicated to offering meals made without any animal products,” said Tamara. “There are lots of reasons people choose plant-based foods — including eating less meat to benefit the environment, animal welfare, a healthier diet, and allergies such as to dairy or eggs. You don't even have to be a vegan to enjoy them. I can't tell you how many customers have been eating at Coco Bean for years before they realized everything was plant-based.”

As a vegan for the past 12 years and a vegetarian long before that, Tamara enjoyed developing a menu concept that doesn't include meat, but that still feels familiar and tastes delicious. For more substantial meals, customers can choose from an array of breakfast burritos and sandwiches, and on weekends the brunch menu will include items like pancakes and vegan chicken and waffles.

Tamara is also proud to partner with some of the region's most creative local chefs, bakers and artisanal food makers. In addition to sourcing many items locally to reduce Coco's footprint, all the café's to-go packaging is compostable, and they are using paper straws and recyclable items like parchment paper to keep single-use plastics out of landfills.

The Gwendolyn's sustainable design and green features marry well with Tamara's eco-friendly vision. “Grubb Properties has been amazing to work with, and I really appreciate how they've gone above and beyond to bring state-of-the-art features to The Gwendolyn, like enhanced HVAC and touchless entry systems,” noted Tamara. “Being able to start with a blank canvas and build this out exactly as we wanted is allowing us to create something really special for the community. Coco will have floor-to-ceiling windows, also known as a nano wall, that open the entire front of the café so guests can easily enjoy the park outside, the ample outdoor

seating on the wrap-around porch or find a cozy nook inside. The layout is also intentionally built to accommodate events — whether it’s renting out the entire café or hosting a more intimate gathering in a private space in the back.”

Tamara also has big plans to host events for the community at Coco, including live music, movie nights and animal adoption events from one of her nonprofits, Beautiful Together Animal Sanctuary. Located on 83 acres just 15 minutes outside Chapel Hill, the sanctuary rescues at-risk animals from shelters or inhumane conditions and works to find them loving homes.



The idea for the Sanctuary was inspired by Tamara and her husband Steve’s nonprofit, Beautiful Together. They founded Beautiful Together in 2014 to support children waiting for families in both the United States and Africa. Through that work, the Lackeys witnessed the incredible therapeutic connection that children make with animals and the comfort, reassurance and emotional support kids received from them. The Sanctuary offers programs for children in foster care, group homes and at-risk situations to visit the animals, help care for them and

spend time in “pet therapy” sessions bottle feeding kittens, socializing puppies, brushing horses and more. A portion of Coco’s sales will be donated to these nonprofits.

When Coco opens at the end of summer, Tamara is eager to welcome guests into her modern oasis inspired by her travels around the globe. “I can’t wait to be part of The Gwendolyn and the growing Glen Lennox community. It has always been a special place and I’m thrilled to share my vision with this historic neighborhood.”