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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chef Jan Kelly leaving Milwaukee, closing Meritage with celebration

MILWAUKEE, WI - Twenty-one years ago, when Chef Jan Kelly moved to Milwaukee from the West Coast, California's culinary loss was Milwaukee's gain.

The tables are now turning, as Kelly closes Meritage and returns to California to be closer to family.

A series of culinary offerings - including the return of menu favorites and a chefs dinner - are taking place July 13 through August 11, as part of Kelly's culinary farewell to her adopted city.

During her two decades in Milwaukee, Kelly gained a loyal following, first while she was head chef at Barosa in Walker's Point, and then when she opened Meritage in the city's Washington Heights neighborhood.

Kelly leaves a legacy in Milwaukee as one of only a handful of female chef-owners, one whose restaurant earned its place on dining critics' "top" lists year after year. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel dining critic Carol Deptolla named Meritage a Top 30 restaurant seven years in a row. Kelly has also been a semi-finalist for the James Beard Best Chef - Midwest award.

"I'm sad to say goodbye to Meritage and Milwaukee, but I really want the last month we're open to be a time to truly celebrate what we've created here," says Kelly.

"I want my gift to our customers and my adopted city to be the food I cook," says Kelly. "The best celebration I can imagine is to share some of our past favorite menu items."

Meritage's final offerings include:

- **Wednesday Fried Chicken Dinner:** It was her customers' all-time favorite - her buttermilk and Tabasco-brined fried chicken, gravy and chipotle honey, and sour cream biscuits made from her mom's recipe. It's back on the menu Wednesdays - July 20, July 27 and August 3.
- **Menu "Encores" July 14-August 11 (Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays only):** Kelly estimates she has created more than 100 different menu items since opening Meritage - a considerable legacy from which to select just a few favorites to feature during her final month of business. Her chosen encore dishes include the stacked enchilada, bison meatloaf, and grilled romaine Caesar with scallops. (Regular customers should note that Tapas Tuesdays and Mussel Thursdays will be replaced with these encore items.) Watch the Meritage website (meritage.us) and its Facebook page for specifics on each week's encores.
- **Meritage Wine Cellar "Dust-Off":** What do you do with 200 bottles of wine when you're moving across the country? Dust off the bottles, bring them upstairs, and sell them to your customers at sweet prices. Servers will have details and prices.

- **Chefs Dinner, Aug. 10:** Kelly loves to cook, and she really loves to cook with friends - so she's invited several of her most innovative chef friends to cook a farm-to-table dinner at Meritage Wednesday, August 10. In the kitchen will be: Justin Aprahamian, Sanford; Nell Benton, The National; Thi Cao, Buckley's; Mike Engel, Pastiche; Joe Muench, Maxie's, Story Hill BKC, and Blue's Egg. The complete menu may be seen at meritage.us, along with registration information.

The Chefs Dinner will feature dishes made with ingredients from local farms. Kelly is one of a half dozen area chefs whose early commitment to locally grown foods made farm-to-table fare the norm among Milwaukee's best dining establishments. She has been noted for her consistently innovative seasonal cooking using Wisconsin ingredients like Rushing Waters trout, Maple Creek pork and Yuppie Hill Farm chicken and eggs.

"It's a testament to a community of food lovers," says Kelly. "No one does this on their own. The restaurant community and chefs in particular in Milwaukee are like no other. They are generous with their support and always there to lend a hand, wanting your place to succeed and flourish as much as they do their own."

In addition to family, regular customers, and "the best staff in the city," Kelly credits her sous chef Clayton Cass and craft cocktail bartender Dave Ahlf as the perfect complements to her own culinary creativity.

"When I moved here two decades ago, I never imagined all the wonderful things that would happen to me," says Kelly. "This city and the people in it welcomed me, encouraged me and made me the chef I am today."

"My memories and my happiness revolve around making food for people and seeing them enjoy it."

"That is the greatest compliment. The joy cooking brings to me is something I can't describe."

Details of Meritage's month of special menu offerings and events can be found at meritage.us or on its Facebook page.

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