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Virginia Beach to host official James Beard Foundation Dinner

“Beard at the Beach: A Coastal Virginia Celebration of James Beard” positions Coastal Virginia on the National Culinary Stage

VIRGINIA BEACH, VA – April 27, 2026— The Virginia Beach Restaurant Association (VBRA), in partnership with Virginia Eats + Drinks, proudly announces Beard at the Beach: A Coastal Virginia Celebration of James Beard—an officially sanctioned James Beard Foundation fundraising dinner taking place September 21, 2026, at Zoës Steak + Seafood. This landmark event marks the first time a James Beard Foundation dinner will be held in Virginia Beach. The event is presented with the generous support of the Virginia Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau as the lead sponsor.

This one-night-only culinary experience will bring together some of the region’s most celebrated chefs for an extraordinary evening showcasing the depth, talent, and story of Coastal Virginia cuisine.

Founded in 1986, the James Beard Foundation represents the gold standard of American culinary excellence, with awards and programming that shape the national food conversation.

“A James Beard Foundation dinner is not just a meal—it is a moment,” said Martha Davenport, Executive Director of the Virginia Beach Restaurant Association. “Bringing this experience to Virginia Beach is a powerful declaration that our culinary community has arrived on the national stage. This event will elevate our chefs, drive tourism, and reinforce that what is happening here matters—not just locally, but across the country.”

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Hosted by noted food journalist, food historian, and chef Patrick Evans-Hylton, who has covered Virginia eats and drinks for three-plus decades, the evening will feature a curated, multi-course menu highlighting the region's rich culinary heritage prepared by an all-star lineup of chefs from across Coastal Virginia.

“Coastal Virginia cuisine is rooted in history, shaped by the water, and defined by a deep respect for ingredients and place,” said Evans-Hylton. “This dinner is an opportunity to tell the story on a national level, through the creativity of our chefs and the food and foodways that showcase the region as the Birthplace of American Cuisine.”

The evening will include a cocktail reception with passed hors d'oeuvres, a multi-course dinner with curated beverage pairings in an intimate and upscale setting.

Events of this caliber extend far beyond a single night. Hosting a James Beard Foundation dinner places Virginia Beach among a select group of culinary destinations, drawing media attention, culinary travelers, and high-value visitors—while creating lasting economic impact across the region's restaurants, hotels, and hospitality businesses.

Limited tickets will be available, with sales opening this summer through VBRA. Exclusive, chef receptions will be held in advance of the event.

For Virginia Beach, Beard at the Beach represents more than an event—it is a defining moment in the city's culinary evolution.

ABOUT THE VIRGINIA BEACH RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION

The Virginia Beach Restaurant Association (VBRA) is the only dedicated restaurant business association in Hampton Roads, representing over 130 local restaurants.

VBRA advocates for policies that support a vibrant, sustainable hospitality industry while promoting Virginia Beach as a premier culinary destination.

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