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Nonprofit takes up challenge of healthy meals on shoestring budget  
R.I.C.'s Market fundraiser opens awareness

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by Daniel J. Watson



PHOTO | TROY HULL  
R.I.C.'s Market founder Angela Gray.

Can you feed a family of four with \$25?

Roots In the Community Market Foundation, or R.I.C.'s Market, will host its second annual "Slice n' Dice" competition on March 18 from 5-8 p.m. at Project 658 in Charlotte. Teams from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, YBM Leadership Alliance and the Heaton family of Charlotte will prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner in a three-round cook-off. Toussaint Ware, the 2017 champion and director of business development at Secure Comfort Care as well as Mayor Vi Lyles are among the judges.

General admission is \$75 (early bird \$55) and VIP admission is \$100 (early bird \$75) and includes three-course dinner and entertainment. Tickets are available at [www.ricsmarket.org](http://www.ricsmarket.org).

Participants can eat a three-course dinner as they watch competitors manage their pans and pockets. There will also be chance to win door prizes, giveaways and raffle of handmade quilt.

"I want people to know it is possible to eat healthy when you don't have a lot of time and a lot of money," said R.I.C.'s Market Founder Angela Gray. "It's going to be very educational but fun at the same time. A variety of people all in one place will also create another way for people to network."

Food insecurity is the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Thirty-five percent of families with children in Mecklenburg County at some point experience food insecurity.

"You may live near a store but if you can't afford the food in the store then really it doesn't matter," Gray said. "You can be middle class or above, but it's tough being put in a situation where maybe you got laid off, piling medical expenses and not be able to afford food. Parents actually had to decide between paying bills, buying medicine or do I buy groceries."

The nonprofit market, which Gray launched in 2014, uses grants and donations to lower the cost of food, which is passed on to customers. It also encourages healthy eating through education, demonstrations and classes.

Gray dreamed of R.I.C.'s Market as a child in Detroit. "Slice n Dice" is one component of her vision of alleviating food insecurity.

"We had food issues for a very long time," she said. "I told my mom I wanted to open a free store and she was like 'you won't be in business very long.' As I got older I realized that it didn't necessarily have to be a free store but it could be a nonprofit. About five years ago I was telling a friend it was a retirement goal and they were like 'well, we kind of need it now.' We believe that if you can give people access, make it affordable, and educate them on it then you can move people to healthier eating."

A livestream of the cooking challenge will be shown at: [www.facebook.com/RICsMarket](http://www.facebook.com/RICsMarket).

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