

VOLUNTEER-LED OAKLAND COLLECTIVE TO OPEN A COMMERCIAL-GRADE COMMUNITY KITCHEN

Group hopes to feed the people in nearby neighborhoods

Oakland, CA - Last December Omni Commons [launched a crowdfunding campaign](#) to renovate its dilapidated professional kitchen and bring it up to code for community use. Since purchasing the property in December, 2016, the nonprofit, all-volunteer “collective of collectives” launched building upgrades to improve the space and resources used by many community-based groups and resident projects.

In a city where commercial kitchens are often inaccessible to small food producers due to onerous costs and requirements, Omni Commons will offer a full-service kitchen on a sliding-scale basis to food justice organizations and small local food businesses. With displacement, homelessness, and food insecurity increasing at a staggering rate, volunteer-based food justice groups such as [East Bay Food Not Bombs](#), [Phat Beets Produce](#), [The Village in Oakland #feedthepeople](#), and [Aunti Frances' Self-Help Hunger Program](#) have been stepping up to meet growing community need, but they lack sufficient space and resources.

“For years, we’ve served free meals to our neighbors every Tuesday out of Aunti Frances’ own kitchen,” said Rachel Gottfried, a volunteer with Aunti Frances’ Self-Help Hunger Program. “But she’s now facing possible eviction and our Driver Plaza meal is in jeopardy. Having a stable, secure cooking environment at the Omni would enable programs like ours to continue.”

“We are a growing source for outreach to communities in need in Oakland, and updating the kitchen at the Omni would provide a critical component for better-aiding these displaced communities,” said Philip McDonald, a longtime volunteer with East Bay Food Not Bombs. “Currently, our aging and inadequate equipment forces us to cook meals off-site, hindering us from meeting the needs of this growing crisis in Oakland. Some days we can’t even find a place to cook. Every week is a struggle.”

The kitchen will serve as the home of several Omni member collectives, including East Bay Food Not Bombs, which has served free food to hundreds of people each week since 1991. Counter Culture Labs, which has been featured in [Wired](#), [Popular Science](#), and [PBS Newshour](#), will also use the kitchen to advance ongoing projects to develop novel food products from edible substrates, fermentation, and mushroom cultivation. Additionally, resident food justice collective Phat Beets will have a space for its programs training youth as food-based entrepreneurs and supporting an extensive network of local food businesses, farmer’s markets, and urban and black farmers. Omni’s newest collective resident, The Village #feedthepeople, will utilize the kitchen to cook the free meals they serve every Wednesday in East Oakland.

Helping to address the shortage of financially accessible indoor community spaces in the East Bay, Omni Commons’ large ballroom/theatre (as well as other spaces in the sprawling building) are available to rent on a generous sliding scale. With the availability of a professional kitchen on-site, renters will soon be able to provide catering for their events, conferences, workshops and meetings.

Groups from the broader community, like the Self-Help Hunger Program, already collaborate with Omni collectives and would immediately benefit from the kitchen's updated functionality.

Although already zoned for commercial-grade food production, the Omni's kitchen needs significant remodeling to be brought up to modern building, fire and health codes. The \$75,000 fundraising goal will go towards permit and contractor fees, building materials, and commercial kitchen equipment and appliances. On January 24th, 2018, Omni announced that Brewster Kahle, founder of the Internet Archive, has promised two matching gifts of \$5,000 to each Phase I and Phase II of the campaign.

Learn more about the vital food justice work the kitchen will support and contribute to the campaign at omnicommons.org/kitchen!

About Omni Commons

Omni Commons is a volunteer-run social center for community organizing, education, science, and the arts, founded in 2014 and located in the Temescal neighborhood of Oakland. Its eleven resident collectives share a political vision that privileges the equitable commoning of resources and meeting of human needs over private interests or corporate profit. By sharing space, knowledge, art supplies, AV and printing equipment, tools, and other resources, these small groups have been able to stay in the East Bay at a time when small non-profits are being displaced. OC offers inexpensive space, almost non-existent in the East Bay at this point in time, to outside groups and individuals for rehearsals, performances, meetings, and fundraisers, supporting many creative individuals and nonprofits that are contributing to Bay area cultural and political life. OC is linked to hackerspaces and social centers worldwide, and is cited as a [model](#) for a [new economy](#).

Keywords

Oakland, commons, community, crowdfunding, commercial kitchen, food justice, local food

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The historic home of Omni COmmons was originally an Italian social club and most recently a rock club.



The theatre-sized ballroom and stage is a common area that hosts panels, classes, poetry readings, dance performances, parties, and benefit events.



Omni collective members Matt and Francisco serving snacks as Dos Manos, their catering cooperative, at the ballroom bar.



The annex is home to creative hackerspace Sudo Room and DIY biology group Counter Culture Labs, two of 12 groups.



Standing room only Catalyst Project event 'Black Liberation and White Anti-Racism in the Time of Ferguson'