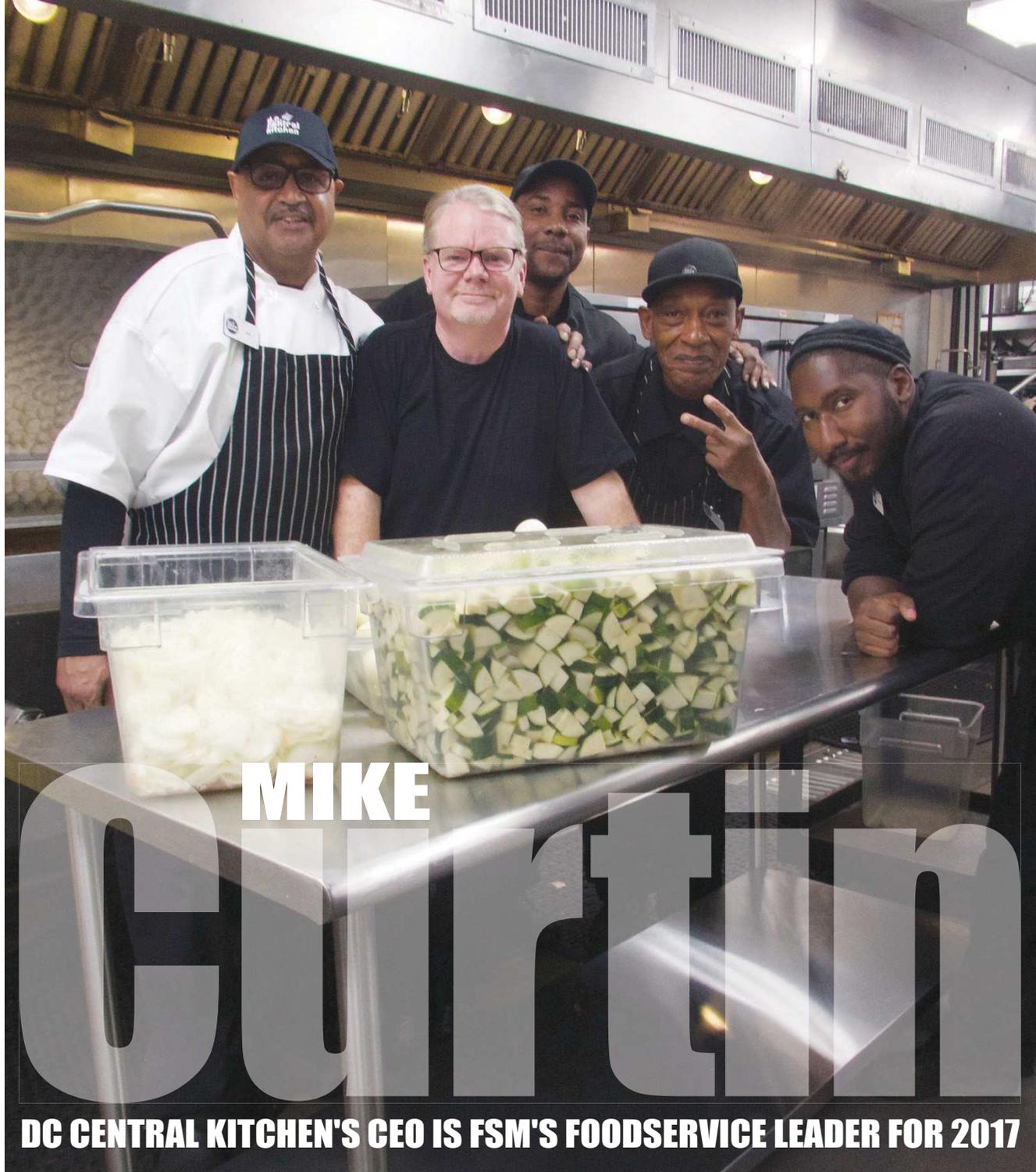


**W**hen you walk into DC Central Kitchen's kitchen about two hours before lunchtime, you are met with the aroma of onions, the sight of dozens of volunteers chopping vegetables in unison, the banter of culinary students stirring pots — really big pots — of soup, and a tangible feeling of camaraderie and hope. At the baton of this “orchestra” — full of energy and commitment himself — is CEO Mike Curtin, who is being recognized as *Foodservice Monthly's* 2017 Foodservice Leader of the Year.

#### Who is Mike Curtin?

Many FSM readers know him already. He describes himself as a “recovering restaurateur” who worked in the hospitality industry for 14 years before joining DC Central Kitchen (DCK) — two of them (2001-2003) as chairman of RAMW — and five of them as owner of the Broad Street Grill in Falls Church, Va. Curtin wanted the Grill to be a community place because, as he says, “restaurateurs are committed to their communities, and restaurants provide a place where people can gather, share, and learn,” along with a hoped-for good meal. His restaurant provided all of that, but when it had to go out of business due to undercapitalization, “I had to admit failure,” he says. “It was very hard for me.”

But good things came out of the restaurant experience anyway, including meeting and volunteering with DCK's founder Robert Egger. When a DC Central Kitchen COO opportunity came along, Mike Curtin applied for the job. That was a little over 13 years ago, and he says it's been “a glorious ride ever since.”



## DC CENTRAL KITCHEN'S CEO IS FSM'S FOODSERVICE LEADER FOR 2017

#### From the beginning...

...Curtin was intrigued with the idea of taking things that most people had marginalized — both food and people — and creating value from them. “I saw in the nation's capital this incredible lacking and this poverty and despair. I saw the Kitchen as a place to fight and change that.” He knew, as did Egger before him, that “we can never feed our way out of hunger. Instead,” he says, “we've got to break our way out of the cycle of poverty with jobs. That's the heart and soul of the Kitchen.”

But there weren't enough jobs when Curtin arrived. At that time, the non-profit was more of a traditional charity, based mostly on philanthropic contributions and left-over food donations. It provided meals for the hungry, certainly, and Curtin expanded catering operations. But that wasn't enough, particularly as the economy went south during the 2007-2008 recession. Curtin realized he had to change the formula because “the money dried up. So, instead of doing what most were doing — hunkering down — we decided to expand. If

we hadn't,” he says, “we'd have had an even bigger hole to climb out of. We had to take it to another level.”

#### That next level...

...included not just providing meals, job training, and catering. “We needed to find a steady, predictable business line with employment and growth potential.” The answer was school food. Today, 63 percent of DCK's budget is earned income, predominantly through a contract to provide meals

**FOODSERVICE LEADER OF THE YEAR** *cont.* pg 14