



## SPOTLIGHT ON

# Bounty & Soul: Nourishing ~ Inspiring ~ Teaching

..... Story by CAPPY TOSETTI | Photos by PAUL M. HOWEY .....

Talking about local food comes naturally for Ali Casparian, founder and executive director of Bounty & Soul, a nonprofit organization in Black Mountain that distributes fresh and healthy produce, and provides interactive classes on nutrition, easy-to-prepare cooking demonstrations, and health and wellness resources to individuals and families in need. It's obviously a passion that comes from the heart.

Ali's journey to help eradicate food insecurity and malnutrition in Western North Carolina began in 2012 with a dream and a little table covered with baskets of donated fruit and vegetables.



"I wanted to do more than provide food," she explains. "I envisioned a place where people could gather, feel connected and empowered to make healthy, sustainable

choices. We've been able to do this thanks to many dedicated and generous individuals donating dollars and countless volunteer hours, plus bushel baskets full of fresh produce from MANNA FoodBank, Bi-Lo Grocery, Swannanoa Community Garden, Dr. John Wilson Community Garden, Gardens that Give, Barefoot Farms, New Sprout Organic Farms,

Rise Up Rooted Farms, and from local gardeners."

Ali continues, "Compassion and community spirit have

nurtured this dream into a reality where we now have three weekly market locations: a nonprofit daycare center, a low-income senior housing center, and a church parking lot in town, serving the residents living in the greater Black Mountain-Swannanoa Valley area. We've made many friends through the seasons, sharing the harvest and introducing delicious low budget recipes, and serving ideas in a fun, supportive and loving environment."

From the start, the mission at Bounty & Soul has been reaching out to Buncombe County's rural areas, which include a sizable population of seniors and low-income residents. Transportation into town can be a challenge, as many people cannot afford the expense of owning a car, while others are no longer able to drive.

Ali knew that having a truck would allow the organization to load up and deliver fresh produce and other foods such as whole grains, beans, and nuts to those individuals living out in the countryside. Her original drawing of a truck that's taped on her wall looks very similar to the Ryder® truck that recently arrived in town. It started its journey in Miami, Florida, where Izzy Moone, special projects manager with Ryder Transportation, helped Ali research and locate a suitable used vehicle. Ali laughs at how she now can now carry on a conversation about chassis frames, hydraulic brake

pads, and shock absorbers.

"It's been quite the learning experience. We began by writing grant proposals and setting up a fundraising campaign to cover the costs of purchasing and retrofitting a truck. That entailed turning an empty shell into a functioning mobile market that included new construction and painting, a side window and awning, collapsible racks for outside baskets, and a wheelchair accessible ramp so folks can select food from inside. We also wanted removable interior shelving that can be rolled outside so it's easier for our volunteers to load up produce at MANNA FoodBank and other locations."

Thanks to a grant from the Diocese of Western North Carolina's Human Hurt and Hope Fund, plus donations from individuals and businesses, residents down country roads now have a new friend arriving in the neighborhood—a bright and festive truck adorned with colorful artwork of fruits and vegetables and the heartfelt slogan that says it all: *Produce to the People!*

To celebrate the new arrival, Bounty & Soul is holding a contest to name the truck. For Ali and all the volunteers, it's more than a big box on wheels; it's a new member of the family ready to help those in need.

For more about the organization and about the contest, visit [bountyandsoul.org](http://bountyandsoul.org).



Ali Casparian

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585 TUNNEL ROAD  
ASHEVILLE, NC