**Restaurateur Ouita Michel named 2020 National Debate Tournament Tribe Award Winner**

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**Cambridge, MA.** (March 25, 2021) – Ouita Michel (https://ouitamichel.com/), a six time James Beard Foundation Award nominee and restaurateur, has been honored by the Board of Trustees of the National Debate Tournament, with the 2020 Laurence H. Tribe Award for Excellence in Public Advocacy. Michel’s award was scheduled to be presented in March of 2020 but was delayed due to the cancellation of last year’s NDT.

The award, named after 1961 NDT champion Laurence H. Tribe, the Carl M. Loeb Professor and Professor of Constitutional Law at Harvard University, is given annually to an alumnae of the National Debate Tournament who has taken advocacy skills acquired through participation in intercollegiate debate and become an exemplary public advocate who makes a real difference in the world.

Michel was a decorated debater for the University of Kentucky from 1982-1985 and won the national title her senior year. After receiving her degree, she enrolled in the Culinary Institute of America. That training has allowed her to return to her native Lexington, Kentucky, and develop a half dozen of the region’s favorite restaurants. Michel has become the face of Kentucky cuisine, appearing on the cover of Southern Living Magazine and having her restaurants featured in The New York Times, Garden & Gun, the Food Network, the Cooking Channel and television shows such as Diners, Drive-ins and Dives and Bravo’s Top Chef Kentucky series.

Michel has been a James Beard Foundation Award nominee as Outstanding Restaurateur and Best Chef Southeast numerous times. In February of 2021 she was selected by the Nation’s Restaurant News as one of the 50 members of the 2021 Power List. Her first cookbook, Just a few Miles South, is set to be released in April of 2021.

Michel has been a powerful force within her community as well. She is an alumna of the James Beard Chef’s Boot Camp for Policy and Change. She is a member of the Southern Foodways Alliance, and serves on the boards of Food Chain-a non-profit food incubator in Lexington, Hindmand Settlement School, and the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. During the pandemic Michel has been driving force in Kentucky working with other local entrepreneurs to feed those in need and on the frontlines, and to advocate for an industry that had been hit hard. She was particularly active in working with the community of women business owners in her region, helping establish programs like “Let’s Talk” and a website, Kentucky Duchess, that could connect women owned food and beverage businesses to facilitate collaboration. Her work with the Independent Restaurant Coalition was essential in making the case for so many of those small businesses that were struggling to survive.

“Ouita Michel chose a path that was quite different from so many of our other graduates. But as a chef, entrepreneur and business leader she has used her voice and her skills to advocate for those in need, to take a leadership role within her industry, and to speak out on important policy issues facing the nation. She is an excellent example of how important it is for those who are in a position to lead to have found their voice and to have the skills to have an impact. said Dr. Edward Panetta, Chair of the NDT Board of Trustees.

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The American Forensics Association’s National Debate Tournament is one of the most storied traditions in competitive intercollegiate speech and debate. The Tournament, which began in 1947, hosts 78 of the most outstanding teams from across the nation and showcases the best in intercollegiate debate. <https://nationaldebatetournament.org/>