



Les Dames d'Escoffier
INTERNATIONAL



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Founded in 2013

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Winter 2022

President's Note

Dear Dames,

This is my first letter as the Birmingham chapter president, and I couldn't be more thrilled. Past President Kathy G. has teed things up beautifully, and I am confident that, with her guidance and your creativity, our impact in the next two years will be even greater. With a new class of 12 energetic members joining this year, the possibilities are limitless.

Meanwhile, it's been a busy fall! During September, Birmingham Dames showed up strongly for Women in Food Month at the Market at Pepper Place, hosting cooking demos every Saturday, promoting the organization, and bringing goodies to sell each week that raised almost \$2,000!

Later in September, Dames stepped up at the 20th Annual Fiesta Celebration, sharing the LDEI message with thousands of Latin community supporters in Linn Park and presenting a \$3,000 scholarship to a smiling and very grateful Arantza Montserrat Rivero Flores, a foods and nutrition student at the University of Alabama. Our members shared more of LDEI's power and sparkle as sponsors at the BBJ Women's Summit.

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Our Biggest Fundraiser Ever!



The 2022 edition of Champagne & Fried Chicken turned out to be the most successful fundraiser in our chapter's nine-year existence. We broke records in basket sales and sponsorships, with profits topping \$115,000 (of that, \$90,500 came from sponsorships). Extras like cocktail kit purchases and a restaurant raffle added to the festivities. The delicious food drew rave reviews.

This money will fund our grants and scholarships, increase our endowment, and provide money for our operating budget and next year's fundraiser—and we are very proud of that achievement. Best of all, however, was the camaraderie and fun we Dames shared working side by side for a cause we all believe in. Our guests caught the spirit of the occasion, too, with many enjoying their picnics and live music onsite.

Let's mark our calendars for C&FC 2023, already set for Oct. 1. It will be hard to top this year's event—but with our track record, it won't be surprising if next year's fundraiser has us saying once again: "Wow! That was the best ever!" See page 2 for more.

Champagne & Fried Chicken in Pictures



All photos by Joe DeSciose



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Dames Partner to Launch A New Food Festival for Birmingham

by Leigh Sloss-Corra

This past October, food and community leaders joined together to announce and launch FOOD+, a new annual food festival for Birmingham.

The idea for FOOD+ arose out of Birmingham’s successful hosting of IACP43, the International Association for Culinary Professionals’ 43rd Conference, held at Pepper Place and Sloss Furnaces in October of 2021. With major support from the Alabama Tourism Department (“Sweet Home Alabama”), and commitments from partners including the Rane Center at Auburn University, the Greater Birmingham Convention and Visitors Bureau, IACP, *Southern Living*, LDEI, the Market at Pepper Place, Jones Valley Teaching Farm, the Birmingham Originals and the Alabama Humanities Alliance, FOOD+ Culture Fest was launched in October 2022 with a reveal party in the streets of Pepper Place on Thursday night, October 13.

The event also included a FOOD+ Super Wellness Day at the Market at Pepper Place on October 15. Both events were star-studded and well attended, with community leaders and local cultural and food icons sharing inspirational messages, “Why I care about food and culture in Birmingham,” interspersed with cooking demos, discussion, dance and music performances from diverse groups from the area.

Thursday’s evening event kicked off with introductions by Mayor Randall Woodfin, Lee Sentell, the director of Alabama Tourism, and Dame Cathy



One of the dancers from Nathifa West African Dance and Drums.

Sloss Jones, followed by “I heart Birmingham” testimonials from James Beard Award-winning Chef Chris Hastings, Continental Bakery owner Carole Griffin, *Southern Living* Editor Sid Evans, Rane Center Director Hans van der Reijden, Dame April McClung, and others.

The evening wrapped up with kids from Red Mountain Theater singing “Food, Glorious Food,” and final words by FOOD+ Board Members Dames Cheryl Slocum and Leigh Sloss-Corra, and food writer Chanda Temple.

Small bites were provided by some of the city’s top chefs, including Abhi Sainju of Abhi Restaurant, James Beard Award winner Adam Evans of Automatic Seafood, Jorge Castro and Dame Aimee Castro of Sol y Luna, Chefs Tyler and Jennifer Lyne of Tasting TBL and Restaurant 1856, Dame Crystal Peterson of Yo’

Mama’s, and Dame Susan Notter of Elizabeth Moore Chocolates. Drinks were donated by International Wines, with assistance from Dame and Certified Sommelier Alexis Douglas, with a craft cocktail created by LDEI Entrepreneur Winner Rylie Hightower of The Lumbar, using donated spirits from Dread River.

On Saturday at the Market, the Food + Super Wellness Day featured a number of Dames, among others, in various programs. A panel about “The Magical World of Mushrooms” was moderated by Dame Clara Darling, who enlisted the help of Samford University nutrition students to cook up 10 lbs of different exotic mushrooms for the audience to sample. Dame Carolyn Williams joined other authors to sign copies of her new book, *Meals That Heal*



One Pot. The FOOD+ Storytellers Program which featured civic leaders and local icons was wrapped up by Dame Crystal Peterson’s personal story that had the audience, laughing, crying, and on their feet cheering at the end.

Planning for the FOOD+ 2023 Festival is already underway, with LDEI’s partnership hopefully playing a critical role. The festival next year will build on this year’s event, include an awards ceremony, and take place over four days in mid-October. FOOD+ 2024 will be even robust, to help celebrate Alabama Tourism’s Year of Alabama Food. The purpose of FOOD+ is to highlight food as the uniter, “the universal thread that knits together our city’s rich cultural fabric.” Oh, and to also have fun. All ideas are welcome: info@bhamfoodplus.com.

Above: Dancers from Danza Azteca Xochipilli were among the exciting performers.

At right: Dame Crystal Peterson of Yo’ Mama’s served small bites.

Below right: The event kicked off with introductions by Mayor Randall Woodfin and Dame Cathy Sloss Jones.



How to Do the LDEI Conference: Arrive Early, Stay Late, Represent the Entire Time

by Susan Swagler, Kathy G. Mezrano, and Betsy McAtee

We took the first plane there and the last plane back when we went to the LDEI 2022 Conference in New York City in October. We’ve learned from past conferences: If you want to see some (any) of the city you are visiting, you have to make time because the conference is two full days of back-to-back sessions; meetings; networking opportunities; presentations; and food, wine and cocktails (of course).

You’ll hardly see the light of day while it’s going on.

So, Kathy G. Mezrano, Betsy McAtee, and Susan Swagler—the Birmingham Chapter Delegates—arrived on **Wednesday** ahead of the Thursday morning registration and spent the day as tourists. That meant lunch at Gramercy Tavern (after a brisk 20-block walk to the Flatiron District to get there). “You can never go wrong starting the trip with a lunch at Gramercy Tavern, Danny Meyer’s Michelin-starred restaurant,” Kathy says. Then we visited the 9/11 Memorial and had a fantastic dinner at the SoHo brasserie Balthazar.

On **Thursday** we all had pre-purchased guided tours and spent most of the day doing those. Kathy and Susan walked across the Brooklyn Bridge and explored the food options in the DUMBO area (see Taking a Bite of the Big Apple for details on how you can do this, too). We took the ferry back to Manhattan, visited Fearless Girl on Wall Street, and took the subway back to Grand Central Station.

Betsy toured the Lower East Side and visited the popular Tenement Museum and Katz’s Deli (again, see Taking a Bite of the Big Apple for details of her tour).

The conference officially opened on Thursday with a cocktail reception (with living statues of New York’s iconic landmarks for photo ops). Then all Dames were on their own for dinner (with loads of Dame-owned and Dame-recommended options, which we can share—just ask). Kathy and Betsy went to One Fifth. “A true New Yorker gave us this tip,” Kathy says. “It was all small plates, which gave us a chance to try a lot of savory items of contemporary Italian fare. The wines were divine, and the staff couldn’t have been more personable. Would definitely keep it on the list!” Susan went to see *Hamilton* (and had a bag of Lays potato chips for dinner). Then Kathy and Susan went to The Skylark for a cocktail party 30 floors above Times Square. (See the piece in Taking a Bite of the Big Apple that Susan wrote for the LDEI Quarterly.)

On **Sunday**, after the conference closed, we had brunch at Marcus Samuelsson’s Red Rooster in Harlem with the Sing Harlem choir taking us to church. This is something we highly recommend, as this choir, starting with our brunch, has resumed doing this every Sunday with two shows at 12:15 and 1:45 p.m. Then we hit the drizzly streets and did some additional sightseeing. We enjoyed visiting Jean-Georges Vongerichten’s Tin Building of marketplaces and

restaurants (thanks Gia McCollister for this recommendation!) where we sat at Beer Here! to people watch ... and saw Jean-Georges!

These few days bookended two days of busy conference where we shared what we are doing in Birmingham with other chapters, made new friends across the country and across the pond, represented our chapter at the delegates meeting, and looked for new ideas and information we could share with you.

On **Friday**, early, through **Saturday**, late, we got down to business.

There were morning and afternoon sessions both days, and we split up to get the most out of them. Here’s the thing about the sessions at this conference: They are mostly panel discussions and not really about education. But here are some key takeaways:

- In a session about best practices for restaurant owners and other leaders, Amanda Cohen, chef-owner of the Michelin-starred vegetable restaurant Dirt Candy NYC, talked about making her no-tip business work (she was the first in the city to eliminate tipping and instead share profits with employees). She spoke about doing away with “shift drinks,” encouraging employees to find healthy ways to bond, the importance of staff diners, and finding ways for her staff to share their own food traditions with their co-workers. She says she used to look at her staff as a group, but now she must see her Gen Z employees as individuals. **She also advised anyone with more than 20 employees to have**

an HR department or dedicated service.

- Erin Reifsynder, MA, a mental health counselor and Board Member of Restaurant After Hours, talked about that organization’s resources for restaurant owners and employees. This is a national nonprofit offering mental health advocacy, resources, support, and continuing education for the hospitality industry. Part of their mission is to consolidate mental health info for hospitality workers so they can find what they need in one place. There are free virtual support groups for hospitality workers; a mental health survey; and downloadable toolkit links to crisis hotlines, online communities, and mental health organizations. **Find out more at restaurantafterhours.org.**

- In a seminar on rebuilding your brand, Dames were encouraged to focus on using today’s tools—podcasts, social media, reels, etc. **Basically, start doing these things—or do more of these things strategically—and be open to what comes your way.** “It’s the way of the world now,” Kathy G. reports, “so ‘go with it’ and see where it leads you.”
- There’s always a session that focuses on local food or drink; that was the case with “New York in Your Glass: Grapes and Grains and Apples, Oh My! Betsy says she didn’t realize that New York is the 3rd largest wine-producing state in the U.S. She knows now. The panel for this discussion included several women in the beverage industry—the winemaker from Red Tail Ridge Winery in the Finger Lakes region, the owner of Harlem Brewing Company, and the tap-room manager at Abandoned Hard

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Photo ops everywhere! From the wall of New York foods in the registration area to the NYC skyline to living New York icons, we took lots of photos.



Cider. Betsy says, “Abandoned Hard Cider was named after an apple orchard that had been abandoned. They reclaimed it and used the apples to produce hard cider. They also crowdsource apples for their craft ciders from other abandoned orchards, wild spaces, and backyards in the Catskill Mountains and Hudson Valley. It was delicious!!” **The women on the panel all talked about the challenges of being a female in their industry and how their products had to be superior to others in the market for them to gain the respect of peers in their industry.** That’s something that’s familiar to lots of us.

The breakfast speakers at the conference are always great, and we heard from legendary Dame Jessica Harris, PhD, author of *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America* (there’s a Netflix doc, too). Dr. Harris spoke about growing up in New York, attending the United Nations school as a child (where she was introduced to global cuisine by her classmates), being a food reviewer for *The Village Voice*, and simply savoring whatever life brings your way.

The next morning, we heard from food entrepreneur, author, and culinary historian Jeffery Yoskowitz. He was a wealth of knowledge about the immigrant history and influence on the ever-changing food scene in this amazing city and in our nation, too. Wonder how pretzels and bagels became synonymous with NYC? They were easy to pile up onto long sticks so the early street vendors (we’re talking 1800s) could sell more of them. Niki Russ Federman, 4th-generation co-owner of NYC’s renowned culinary landmark and “appetizing store”



Above: Katz's Deli is an NYC icon thanks to its legendary pastrami sandwich, but it was made even more famous thanks to Meg Ryan's famous scene in When Harry Met Sally. At left: Susan Swagler and Kathy G. Mezrano stopped to see Fearless Girl on Wall Street.

Russ & Daughters, joined him for a lively discussion.

The lunches and dinners are memorable, too. We really enjoyed the Partner Showcase lunch when our own **Leigh Sloss-Corra** was recognized for her Woman of Purpose Growth Grant. It was great to hear from Angela Lyn Dansby who won the M.F.K Fisher Prize for her story on “Europe’s 500-Year-Old Seafood Tradition” (shrimping on horseback).

On Friday night everyone went to the iconic Pier Sixty at Chelsea Piers for a gala dinner. This began as a huge, exciting cocktail party—with stunning views of the Statue of Liberty and the New Jersey skyline—hosted by New York Dames who delivered “The World on a Plate” with their tasting stations: Maria Loi (Greece), Grace Young and Dim Sum Go Go (China) Shin Kim (Korea), Pauline Awino Pinnock (Africa), and

Marisa May-Metalli (Italy). These delicious, global dishes beautifully (and cleverly) reflected their various food heritages.

Kathy G. says, “I couldn’t take photos fast enough!” Here are a few of the catering presentations that got her excited:

- A mojito granita served as frozen lime wedges on a bed of salt.
- A “luge” from Dame Michael-Ann Rowe (who offered Canada on a Plate). You eat the raw oyster with a fork, leaving the natural liquor behind in the shell. Then you pour a bit of bourbon into the shell and slurp the briny, boozy mix right down!
- The Greek red lentil “meatball” on bibb lettuce with thick tzatziki sauce.
- Dim Sum Go Go’s crisp shrimp and vegetable rolls and Three Star (lotus root) Dumplings.
- The Korean vegetable bibimbap.
- Shrimp with rosemary cannellini beans, tomatoes and EVO at the Italian station.
- Passed hors d’oeuvres featured a chicken bite in a Brussel sprout leaf, pigs in pretzel roll blankets, mini Coney Island hotdogs, and mini tacos with watermelon margarita shots.

This was followed by a spectacular, formal sit-down dinner in the “Club CB Speakeasy” with live jazz and a lovely video presentation to honor the late Carol Brock, founder of LDEI. The vibe in this room (accessed only after we spoke the secret password) was reminiscent of the swank New York Supper Clubs from the 1920s Prohibition Era. It was, in a word, unforgettable and featured salmon tartare with caviar crostini and gilded egg flan; grilled tournedos of beef with truffled hollandaise and red wine bordelaise and truffled parmesan pommes

frites; chocolate red wine noir with dark chocolate ganache, candied hazelnuts, caramelized figs and black currant sorbet; and an assortment of butler-passed signature sweets.

The end of the night saw guys carrying warm, soft pretzels dangling from clear umbrellas. Those were takeaway snacks along with some delicious “poppycock.”

The Grande Dame Dinner on Saturday honored two amazing Dames—Bev Shaffer and Paula Lambert. Bev is a chef, culinary consultant, and advocate, and Paula is the founder of the Mozzarella Company. Both have done so much to move their chapters and the international organization forward. After the dinner, where Betsy won the “Taste of Sonoma” package in the LDEI raffle, the three of us went to The Django, a Paris-inspired jazz club and cocktail bar under The Roxy Hotel in SoHo.

Kathy, Betsy, and Susan represented our chapter at the Council of Delegates annual business meeting where the international organization’s budget and planning for the next year were some of the items discussed. Then, during the New Business portion of the meeting, Kathy G. and Susan shared some of the initiatives the Birmingham Chapter has taken on—our work with The Community Food Bank of Central Alabama (both volunteering and helping with their own fundraiser), our education efforts at The WellHouse, and our new scholarship partnership with Fiesta, Inc. and our local Hispanic community. Susan told those assembled there: “Every chapter here today has at least one similar organization in their own communities, and you can partner with them like we are doing in Birmingham.”

The LDEI Bham chapter is one to watch

We were the only chapter to contribute to the LDEI Annual Business Meeting and share what we are doing back home. We came prepared to do this and to share Christiana Roussel’s great *B-Metro* magazine article, and we were slammed with questions when the meeting was over.

Here’s the thing: The Birmingham chapter has become THE one to watch. We are having successful fundraisers, we are intentionally becoming more diverse every year, we have a solid system in place for distributing our grants and scholarships, we are careful stewards of the money we raise and we are growing our endowment so we can remain relevant, we are reaching out to other like-minded nonprofits in ways that make sense and forward our mission of philanthropy, and we are making a real difference in our community and in our state.

We have a lot to be proud of—most especially that we all come together to make this happen.

Kathy and Betsy and Susan are all humbled to have represented our chapter—and shared our culture and accomplishments—in New York.

Taking a Bite of the Big Apple

by Susan Swagler, Kathy G. Mezrano, and Betsy McAtee

The Birmingham Delegates to the LDEI Conference made the most of their time in New York. Here's what they did and how you can do it, too.

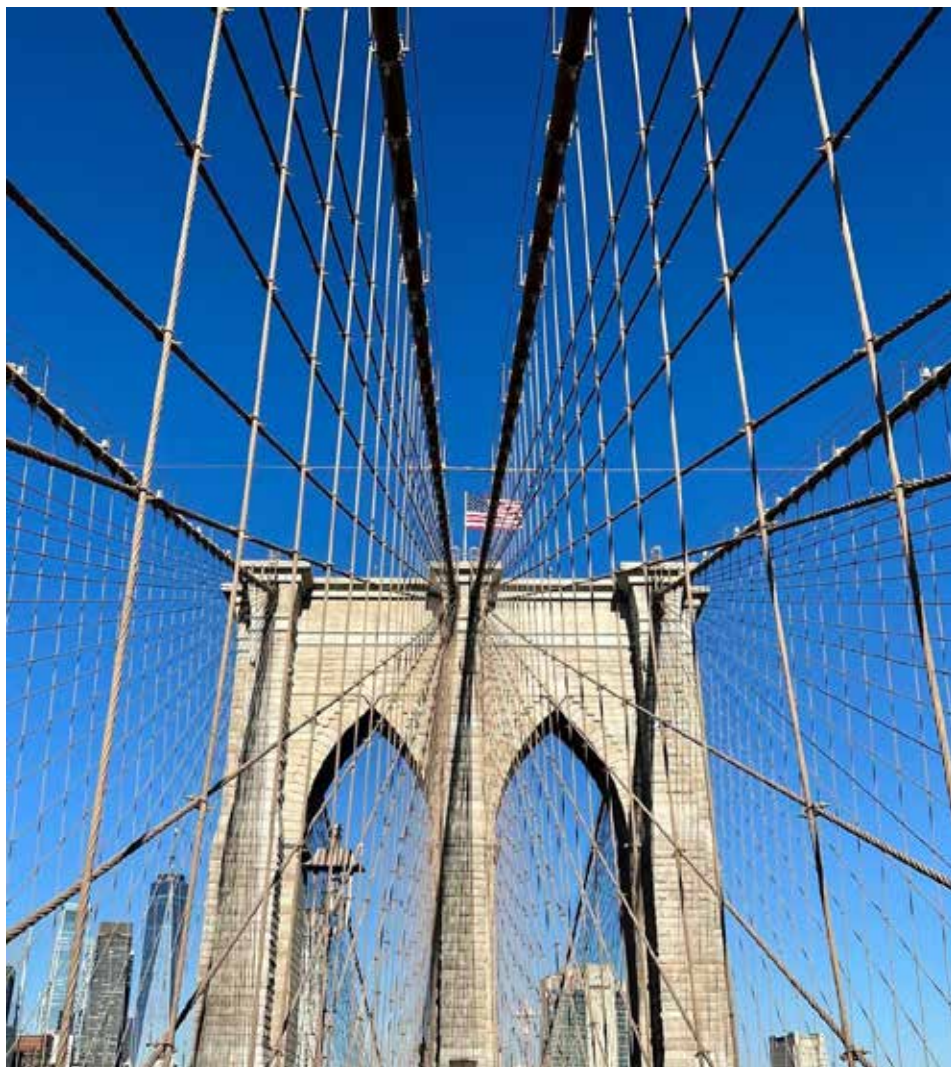
Over the Bridge for an Edible Tour of the DUMBO

We started our Brooklyn tour at The Common/City Hall Park (this is where Alexander Hamilton gave his first major public speech in support of the Boston Tea Party). From there, we followed our tour guide to the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge. You might want to stop at one of the vendors on the bridge to pick up a Brooklyn hat (\$5)—the best souvenir!

The bridge is 1.1 miles long, and when it was built in 1883, this “hybrid cable-stayed suspension bridge” was the longest such structure in the world. It spans the East River between Manhattan and Brooklyn and offers spectacular views of the bridge itself and its steel cables, the Statue of Liberty and the city.

We learned that this bridge was completed by a woman. Emily Warren Robebling, an engineer, spent 10 years supervising the bridge workers in their efforts to complete the bridge after her husband, the chief engineer, was stricken with decompression disease.

We left the bridge on the Brooklyn side and entered the exciting DUMBO area (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass) for a movable feast that started with crunchy, yet pillowy, hand-rolled bagels from La Bagel Delight. We ate them at some picnic tables



The iconic Brooklyn Bridge was completed by a woman. Emily Warren Robebling, an engineer, spent 10 years supervising the bridge workers.

under an overpass. We had cookies from Dawn's 'til Dusk, beautiful croissants from Almondine Bakery and authentic New York coal-fired pizza from Juliana's Pizza (consistently among the top pizza places in New York). And we stopped in at the trendy TO (Time Out) Market for a drink, empanadas, and some great photos on the patio.

The group walked down toward the river and marveled at the restored carousel near the expansive green space, which is something developers have to include in their projects in this area. We could

have spent an entire day here just wandering around. The DUMBO area is quite exciting with trendy boutiques, beautiful art galleries, gourmet markets and lots of women-owned businesses like One Girl Cookies and Superfine.

We took the ferry back to Manhattan instead of the van we had started in that morning, and it was a great way to see both Brooklyn and Manhattan from a different perspective. We landed near Wall Street, so, of course, we went looking for the Fearless Girl. Then we took the subway back to Midtown

where we got off at Grand Central Station (and admired that fantastic space) before returning to the hotel.

Historic Tour of the Lower East Side, the Tenement Museum, and Katz's Deli

First some basic history: New York was originally called New Amsterdam by the Dutch and before that, the Native American word for “many hills” translates to Manhattan.

The Lower East Side was an Eastern European settlement as well as a Jewish settlement.

Betsy and her group got a private docent-led tour of the Tenement Museum where they saw the actual places where the immigrants that arrived in the United States lived and supported each other. “It had a true community feel,” Betsy says, “as the rooms were very small and only two rooms per ‘apartment’ meant that someone—usually a baby or small child—would sleep in the kitchen area when it was not in use. We saw the actual 1900 U.S. census listing for the couple who lived in the tenement along with their demographic information: nationality, age, sex and ‘can read’ ‘can write’ ‘can speak English’ notations. All of the men on the list could read and write and speak English; none of the females on the list could read, write or speak English. The majority of those arriving on the census were dressmakers or tailors. We also learned the role females played in the Kosher Meat Boycott of 1902.”

A little more history worth noting, according to the Women's Jewish Archive: On May 15, 1902, Jewish housewives on the Lower East Side poured into the streets, breaking windows and throwing meat. The women were protesting a jump in the price of kosher meat



Dames Kathy G. Mezrano and Susan Swagler went on an edible tour of DUMBO, sampling food from a variety of restaurants and bakeries.

from 12 to 18 cents a pound. Three weeks into the boycott, the price of kosher meat was lowered four cents when the Meat Trust agreed to drop prices to 14 cents a pound. Even though prices would rise again, the boycott had mobilized and politicized a group not traditionally involved in organized protest. Unlike most women involved in the labor movement in this period, the women who participated in the boycott were mostly homemakers in their thirties. Although mainly immigrants, most of the women had been living in the United States for many years and were asserting what they saw as American rights—the right to demand fair prices, the right to protest publicly, and the right to speak freely and openly. The boycott would become a model for future protests and was in many ways a precursor to larger scale strikes, including the 1909 Shirt-waist Strike.

Next, the group toured Essex Market, which was the first indoor grocery store concept. Prior to the indoor market, street (push) cart vendors were how people purchased their food and supplies. The original building is no longer in use, but they toured the new location with various vendors of cheese, meat, spices and wine.

The group enjoyed bagels from Kossar's Bagels & Bialys and learned the reason a New York bagel is so wonderful is because of the water. Most experts believe the specific mineral content of the water in NYC produces the bagels that we love. They also sampled babka, a sweet, braided bread that is of Russian origin and named for the word mamushka, which means “mother.”

Along the way, they passed one of the oldest religious structures in

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New York City—Angel Orensanz. This 1849 Gothic former synagogue, modeled after the Cathedral in Cologne, is where Sarah Jessica Parker and Matthew Broderick were married. They saw a building with a statue of Lenin on the top (which mysteriously appeared under cover of darkness one night). “We stopped by Economy Candy; one of the oldest stores in New York,” Betsy says. “Believe me: If it is made, they have it!!” On the way to Katz’s Deli, they took a peek into Russ & Daughters, a New York culinary and cultural icon. This appetizing store was the very first in the country to have the name “and daughters.” Before that, businesses were always “and sons.”

The final stop on this Lower East Side tour was lunch at Katz’s Delicatessen. Katz’s Deli, Betsy reminds us, is famous for something other than the legendary pastrami sandwich. The deli gained notoriety in the movie When Harry Met Sally. You’ll probably remember when the woman customer tells her server: “I’ll have what she’s having” after Meg Ryan’s character makes a scene. “We all know the scene!!”

Rob Riener, who produced the movie, had seen the demise of the typical New York deli and wanted to spotlight this unique type of busi-

ness. There are only about 10 true such delis still in existence. “It was a wonderful experience,” Betsy says. As someone in the meat business, she especially appreciated the deli meats—the brisket, corned beef, turkey and “incredible pastrami.”

Birds-Eye View of New York at Night at The Skylark

The bright lights of the big city were the perfect, sparkly backdrop to a special cocktail party for Dames on Thursday evening after they dined throughout the city.

The semi-private fête at The Skylark, an upscale lounge 30 stories above the heart of Times Square, was limited to 50 Dames and guests, so those in attendance had to sign up early. Their reward: an intimate party and a true NYC nightlife experience in one of Manhattan’s coolest (and highest) lounges. This beautiful and trendy space—with breathtaking views of a city that certainly wasn’t sleeping—is managed by a company owned by NY Dames Alison Awerbuch and Abigail Kirsch.

The rooftop, indoor lounge is sophisticated and comfortable with plenty of communal sofa seating in front of floor-to-ceiling windows. Stylish lighting illuminated modern art on the walls and books

and objets d’art arranged on consoles. A DJ kept the vibe upbeat and fun with music ranging from Prince’s Raspberry Beret to Lynyrd Skynyrd’s Sweet Home Alabama. Dames also could venture to the outdoor viewing areas for spectacular photo ops of some of New York’s most iconic scenes including the Hudson River, the Empire State Building, Times Square, and the Chrysler Building.

Our dedicated bartenders made drinks to order (everyone got two drink tickets to sample cocktails from The Skylark’s award-winning mixologists or for beer or wine). There also was a batched maple walnut Old Fashioned—one of The Skylark’s signature cocktails, it was deliciously seasonal with fall spices.

Passed savory hors d’oeuvres showcased a world of flavors: delicious Wagyu sliders with onion jam; crispy duck confit empanadas; umami-rich, miso-glazed king mushrooms; and earthy beet and goat cheese crostini. And sweet treats included little strawberry and chocolate sandwiches and dark chocolate bites.

This optional (and sold-out) event was the perfect way to enjoy this amazing city and kick off our international conference in truly high style.

Fiesta Scholarship Celebration

by Martha Johnston

On Saturday, September 24, Birmingham LDEI awarded our first Hispanic student scholarship to Arantza Montserrat Rivero Flores during Fiesta Birmingham, Alabama’s largest celebration of Hispanic culture and heritage. Arantza, a student at the University of Alabama in foods and nutrition, received a \$3,000 scholarship.

Dames Susan Swagler and Anna Theoktisto were at the LDEI table that day, handing out Mexican candy and explaining who we are and what we do. Then Anna and Leigh Sloss-Corra presented the award to Arantza who was accompanied by her mother. The family was most appreciative for the scholarship and according to Anna, all shed tears of joy.

On October 23rd, Fiesta Birmingham hosted a scholarship celebration dinner to honor all of the 2022 scholarship winners and the sponsors who funded them at Las Brisa Mexican restaurant in Hoover. Thirty-six people shared a fabulous meal of enchiladas, tacos, and fajitas. Fiesta’s Past President and Secretary Teresa Zuniga Odom welcomed guests, celebrated Fiesta’s 20th anniversary, and introduced all the sponsorship recipients.

Anna Theoktisto and Gia McCollister represented LDEI at the event and were able to visit with Arantza, her mother, Karla, and father, Juan.

Fiesta, Inc. is a 501c3 organization that seeks “to educate the mainstream public about the many



Above: Dames Anna Theoktisto and Leigh Sloss-Corra presented the scholarship check to Arantza Montserrat Rivero Flores, a foods and nutrition student at the University of Alabama, during Fiesta Birmingham. Her mother, Karla (pictured), was there to celebrate.

At right: Anna and Gia McCollister attended the scholarship celebration dinner.



different Hispanic countries and cultures through the best of art, music, dance, and food.” Part of Fiesta’s goal as a festival and as an organization has always been to provide Hispanic students with scholarships to help them further their education in Alabama. In the

past 19 years, Fiesta has awarded more than \$90,000 in scholarships to deserving Hispanic students through their scholarship fund. Our chapter is so proud to be a part of this now, and we plan to continue our scholarship partnership in the years to come!

Packing Food Bank Boxes and Building Relationships

by Susan Swagler

The holiday boxes of food at the Food Bank are especially important for the food-insecure families who receive them. But they also are special for the members of the Birmingham Chapter of LDEI who pack them.

Holiday boxes are what started our volunteer partnership with The Community Food Bank of Central Alabama several years ago. This year, we welcomed some brand-new Dames to our assembly lines and one Dame is making the November volunteer day a tradition with her staff.

Back in 2018, we produced a brochure for the holiday boxes with recipes for Thanksgiving Day and leftovers and food-safety tips. We wrote the recipes, cooked the food, and photographed it, and those involved still look back on this with fond memories and a sense of pride.

We've packed these boxes every November and December since then, and that led to our monthly day of service. We gather at the Food Bank warehouse every third Wednesday of the month from 1 to 3 p.m. to pack or sort foods or do whatever they need us to do that day.

This year's turn of packing holiday boxes was even more meaningful because some of our newest Dames—Christina Saab and Amy Jason—joined in, working alongside those who have been volunteering for months. The team of 11 Dames and friends, with help from volunteers from the local YMCAs, packed 581 boxes in two hours.



Our chapter's holiday tradition of service has turned into a year-round community partnership with the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama.

Dame **Joy Smith** took the holiday spirit even further. She closed her business for a few hours and brought her entire staff from Sorelle Bakery & Café, to work with us. “I wanted to do something to give back—somehow, some way—and this was in front of me,” she says. “It was easy to say, ‘Let’s do this.’” Looking ahead, Smith sees community service like this as a way for her employees to earn extra vacation hours or other perks while volunteering with organizations they care about—whether it’s with food-focused groups or animals or whatever. In the meantime, she adds, “Maybe this could be a November tradition for my staff.”

Our monthly service has cemented our partnership with the Food Bank. That’s why they asked us to help last

year with their inaugural fundraiser, Feast for Hope. We played an important role with our catering Dames producing the food, several regular volunteers talking about our ongoing work there and dozens of Dames showing up that night to serve as hostesses.

We’ll be back again this year; planning already has begun. The 2nd Annual Feast for Hope will take place on Saturday, March 4, 2023.

The Food Bank warehouse—whether in its everyday working state with pallets piled high or all dressed up with chandeliers and a Champagne wall—has become familiar to many Birmingham Dames. And we know it’s a great way to spend our volunteer time and make a real difference in our community.

LDEI Bham shines at the Women’s Summit

by Donna Cornelius

One of the benefits of our trade sponsorship agreement with the *Birmingham Business Journal* for Champagne & Fried Chicken was the opportunity to spread the word about LDEI at the annual Women’s Summit—and to share some tasty treats, too.

The LDEI booth at the Sept. 23 event at Ross Bridge turned out to be one of the most popular spots at the event thanks to yummy contributions from Dames Bronnie Cox, Alexandra Flowers, Frances Gulas, Nancey Legg, Susan Notter, Kay Reed, and Joy Smith.

Several Dames happily staffed our booth, meeting and chatting with the many Summit participants who turned out to hear impressive keynote speakers, to recognize outstanding women, and to network. Those who worked at the event or who helped coordinate our efforts were Anne Cain, Donna Cornelius, Frances Gulas, Lindsey Noto, Susan Notter, Dulce Rivera, Emily Roberts, Leigh Sloss-Corra, Carey Thomasson, and Rachel West.



Meet Our New Members!

Our chapter gained 12 new members in August 2022. Here, get to know the first six of these extraordinary women a little better. The other six will be featured in the Spring 2023 newsletter.

Alexandra Stone Flowers

Place of birth: Birmingham, AL
College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned: FIDM, The New School, Samford University—product development and graphic design
Current position: Co-owner and creative director of Stone Hollow Farmstead
How did you get your start? I was born into a family of creators and doers. I left home early to pursue design—I ended up working in Southern California as a make-up artist while in design school at FIDM. While away, I realized how



much I loved and missed the South. When I returned home, it made perfect sense to work with Stone Hollow as it is a natural expression of all the things I love: beauty, design, food, and family.
What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general? I love dreaming up and creating beautiful things. It is a bonus that I get to do it all alongside my mother.
What does success look like to you? Creating products that our customers love and come back for each season—especially when it

is a gift for someone in their life. Gifts are thoughtful expressions, and when someone chooses to gift Stone Hollow, I feel like we are doing it right.
If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? My Mother’s Montauk Stew — it’s divine! Warm, cozy, & full of flavor.
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? Take my husband and daughter to Italy and eat all the food & drink all the wine.
Bonus: I used to be a competitive show jumper and dressage rider, and my husband plays polo. We are big horse lovers and can’t wait to introduce our baby girl to horses!

Melissa Gray

Place of birth: Gainesville, Florida
College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned: The Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park; Associates of Occupational Studies, Culinary Arts, 2013; Bachelors of Professional Studies, Culinary Arts Management, 2014
Current position: Recipe developer and food stylist at Dotdash Meredith
How did you get your start? My first job was in a small bakery doing the savory side and working the register. I also attended a Pro-Start program my junior and senior year that really set the foundation for my skills and passion.
What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry



in general? I love the creativity and variety. When I was a line cook, I got bored by the constant set of dishes made on repeat every night. In my current role, I get to work with different cuisines, techniques, and styles on a daily basis.
What does success look like to you? Success to me is my life right now! I am happy with my community and my life, my job is fun and creative, and I have worked incredibly hard to alleviate financial stress. That’s all the success I need!
If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? Honestly, my mom’s slow cooker pot roast and

potatoes with her chocolate chip cookies. Not to say either of those things are worthy of a Michelin star, but if it’s my last meal in the world, I want to go out with love in my belly.
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? Spain! I travelled there in college and even after spending three weeks there I still didn’t feel like I scratched the surface. I think another week would be amazing.
Bonus! I am a first-degree black belt in taekwondo. I started martial arts in 2017 to be active and find a community. I absolutely loved it; unfortunately, two ACL surgeries later, I had to hang up my black belt. You can still find me kicking it at Gauntlet Fitness though—just no more sparring matches for me!

Dulce Rivera

Place of birth: Houston, TX
College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned: Samford University, Business Administration
Current position: Executive Director of Mi Pueblo
How did you get your start? I kind of always knew what I was going to do. We have a family business and it was always my vision to one day take it over. I started off working on and off in any area of the business. Seven years ago I came in as a bookkeeper and slowly moved my way up until two years ago when I took the company over.



What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general? I love the rotation and innovation with products and watching purchasing trends. Being involved in the whole process—from purchasing to selling directly to the consumer—it is fascinating to see how things can change.
What does success look like to you? It is mostly measured by how much you have grown both professionally and personally. If you are constantly growing you will see a difference in where you are at each point in time, and each new point is success.

If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? It would be my dad’s revoltillo (salsa and eggs), boiled black beans, fresh cheese from our hometown in Mexico, and flour tortillas.
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? At the moment I would say Greece. It has been on my bucket list to go to the Greek islands and stay in the beautiful bungalows with views of the Mediterranean. But of course I would have a foodie trip so I could have authentic baklava, rosemary chicken, lamb, and so much more.
Bonus: My favorite thing in the world is to travel and learn about different cultures and cultivate different experiences and friendships.

Amy Jason

Place of birth: Sylacauga, AL
College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned: University of Alabama; BS in Business/Marketing
Current position: Owner of Cookie Fix
How did you get your start? I followed my passion of baking and loving others by sharing cookies starting in my college years and then beyond to years of being at home with three kiddos. After years of sharing cookies, everyone knew me for my cookies and desserts and encouraged me to take the leap of faith and start a business. When our second child was headed to college, and we found the tiny spot on 18th Street in Homewood, I knew the timing was right. It has been a lot of work and an abundance of blessings.



What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general? At this time, my focus is building the franchise side of Cookie Fix; which is more brain work, computer work, and intense “figuring things out” than the fun of being in the store. Going into the stores will always be the best part; I get my “fix” by serving our awesome customers, being with our dedicated and amazing team, and of course, getting a fresh baked cookie. Making memories for families, hearing sweet stories of others sharing themselves by sharing Cookie Fix, and watching the growth of our team makes the food and hospitality industry unique and so rewarding.
What does success look like to you? Developing relationships, delivering warm and sincere

customer service to every single customer, developing a strong team, striving for ever increasing excellence in everything that we do, and always knowing that a Cookie Fix cookie is just like they are when I make them at home in my tiny KitchenAid mixer.
If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? Oh that is hard... lasagne, crab cakes, or filet mignon for the entree; a grit cake on the side, and Cookie Fix Peanut Butter Bliss Brownies for dessert + champagne.
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? Go to Greece with a tour guide and eat all the best food.
Bonus: Our entire family of five is obsessed with cookies; we never get tired of them, the kids are always coming up with new ideas for us to try, and around 3 p.m. every day, I NEED a cookie and a Diet Coke.

Tina Liollo

Place of birth: Ft. Walton Beach, FL
College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned: Spring Hill College ; BA in integrated communications; minor in marketing

Current position: Owner Local Link Bham, LLC and this November I opened a new take-home meal business, Teenie’s Take-Home Market, in Mountain Brook.

How did you get your start? I grew up in restaurants—my dad’s family is Greek and owned restaurants in Florida since the ’60s. My mom’s family is Sicilian and cooked all day every day. I officially started my career in the food and beverage industry after college. I did cater-



ing, marketing, and events for Jim ‘N Nick’s BBQ. I established their catering systems and managed all catering sales/operations for Jim ‘N Nick’s for the state of Alabama.

What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general? I enjoy working with different non-profits and helping make their events more successful and beneficial financially. I also really enjoy cooking and sharing my Mediterranean culture with others (that’s why I’m opening Teenie’s Take-Home Market. www.teenies-market.com). I truly enjoy people

and meeting new people all the time; I thrive in different environments and in doing something different each day.

What does success look like to you? Having a balance of work and play. Success is working hard because you enjoy what you do. But success is also resting and taking time out for yourself, too.
If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? PIZZA
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? Mexico. Just post me up on the beach.

Bonus: I have a dog named Guido Vermicelli. He’s a real firecracker and he is everything you’d expect with that name.

Emily Roy

Place of birth: Fort Polk, Louisiana (Army Base)

College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned: Associates Degrees in Baking and Pastry Arts and Culinary Arts

Current position: Senior Managing Chef Publix Aprons Cooking School

How did you get your start? Volunteering in kitchens such as Central Market Cooking School in San Antonio, TX. I met a lot of chefs who have published cookbooks and prepared food with traveling chefs at the cooking school. I also baked pastries for soldiers on military bases and donated food to soldiers who were wounded vets.



What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general? I currently enjoy meeting folks

from all walks in life who truly love to eat and cook. The best part about my job has been giving back to others and seeing how I can impact those around me that I work with and those who sign up for my cooking classes.

What does success look like to you? Success looks like finding joy in what you do each day. If I can make someone smile, I did my job.

If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? Honestly, just give me chocolate chip cookies... please!

If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? I would take my husband to Mexico and eat tons of tacos, I would also buy tacos for random people and shout out, “Which taco is your favorite?!”

Bonus: My dad moved my family about ten times with the Army. I moved about eight more times after that with college and jobs. I believe if you haven’t moved, you need to. There is so much to learn about life each time you change your surroundings.

Vegetable Plant Family Highlight: Chenopodiaceae

By Margaret Ann Snow

Because I have written about the changing of the seasons and happenings on the farm in newsletters past, I’d like to shift my focus and delve deeper into specific plant families that will be in season. For this winter, it will be the Chenopodiaceae family, which includes beets, chard, spinach, and quinoa. Quinoa is the only one that you will not be able to easily find locally this winter.

The Chenopodiaceae family is commonly referred to as the ‘Goosefoot’ plant family due to the similarity in the shape of the leaves to the shape of a goose’s foot. This can be true for beets and spinach, but not for chard.

The most commonly available varieties of beets are red, Chioggia, and golden. The red varieties are notorious for turning everything that particular hue of deep red. To me, they have the most flavor, but I am a beet lover. For those who are not yet converted, the milder flavor of the gold or Chioggia may be preferred. Chioggia beets are named for a particular town in Italy from whence they came. They are pink-skinned and, when sliced into, have surprising pink and white concentric circles inside, resembling a bull’s eye.

Citrus, vinegar, and goat cheese pair well with beets, melding the naturally sweet and earthy flavors of the root. I love Steven Satterfield’s Red Velvet Cake in his cookbook *Root to Leaf*. It highlights the color of the roots, adding in some chocolate for good measure and topping with a fresh chevre frosting. Be sure to utilize the greens, if possible. Read more about beets and find the cake recipe in *To Beets, With Love*, 2019.

The vibrant stalks of rainbow chard bring much needed color to winter



Rainbow chard (above) provides a much-needed dose of color in the winter. Spinach (at right) can be finnickier in the garden, but is often a crowd-pleaser at the table.



dishes. It is an incredibly reliable crop in the garden. When bunching, I like to harvest one stalk of each color, making a true rainbow bunch. I often use chard in place of spinach, mostly because we tend to have more chard around than spinach, but also because I like it just as much, if not better. Chard is great on its own, but also pairs well with lentils or with eggs. On a cold, winter day, make Smitten Kitchen’s Chard, White Bean, and Pancetta Pot Pie (Google it). You will thank yourself!

Several years ago, I wrote an ode to chard on our website and included two recipes specifically using the stems, which often outweigh the greens in a bunch:

Alice Water’s Chard Stem Gratin and Hugh Acheson’s Pickled Chard Stems. You can find them both in *For the Love of Chard*, 2018.

Spinach is likely the most familiar Chenopodiaceae child. It never ceases to amaze me how much it wilts down! In the garden, it can be finnickier and almost seems to thrive in more stressful conditions rather than the optimum ones in our high tunnels. Whether you eat it raw in a salad or sautéed, it is generally a crowd-pleaser. I love to make rich and creamy saag paneer with it.

Any way you prepare them, I hope you enjoy your chenopods this winter!

A Wedding in Ireland

by Leigh Sloss-Corra

A wedding is a great excuse to travel to and discover a new place. My best friend's daughter's big celebration in Ireland in October is a prime example. The timing was right, so my husband and I took the opportunity to stay and travel around an extra 10 days.

Looking back, it's staggering how much we saw, tasted and did in two weeks. Ireland is two-thirds the size of Alabama and yet the landscape, architecture and atmosphere in each spot were strikingly unique. There were some consistencies, of course, and you can count on those wherever you go: pints of Guinness, hearty breakfasts, friendliness, and unpredictable weather. We expected to be drowning in tea, but coffee shops are everywhere. The coffee is delicious and almost seems preferred. Pubs are traditional in every way you'd expect, and remain the #1 gathering place in cities and the tiniest towns. You can never go wrong if you order a pint (of Guinness or beer) with fish and chips. Don't expect green veggies or salad in Ireland; they are virtually non-existent. The one time salad was offered, it was in a fancy restaurant popular with tourists, and presented as a mixture of root vegetables with a few radicchio leaves. Not what I was hoping for.

There were certainly plenty of surprises. Ireland is incredibly agricultural, and large numbers of cows, sheep, and horses can be seen happily grazing on rolling hills everywhere, even alongside major highways. Very picturesque! Did you know that in the 1800s Ireland



Giant's Causeway, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, should not be missed.

was the largest butter producer in the world (a fact we learned at The Butter Museum in Cork)? It's no wonder that companies like Kerrygold continue to ship dairy products from grass-fed cows to countries around the globe, though Ireland has sunk to the number #10 spot, behind India, the US, Pakistan and a few other countries with much higher population and land mass. Even in October, the grass is lush and green. Cows in Ireland clearly have a great life.

Though people seem to eat and drink quite well (butter, cream, fried fish and chips, burgers, and beer are part of the Irish daily diet),

they look incredibly fit. My Irish friends said it's because they walk everywhere and lead naturally active lives. Nature is accessible everywhere and people get out and enjoy it. Irish people love their sports, and soccer, cricket, rugby, and golf are popular with all ages. Abundant rivers and streams and endless coastline make fishing and boating available to all. Everyone we met was so pleasant, friendly, and happy to chat. No one stresses about weather or politics. People take their kids everywhere. Old people are out and about, too. It could not have been more different from the U.S.



At left: A double rainbow over the ruins of Dunluce Castle in Northern Ireland was a serendipitous bonus. Bottom left: A view of Ballynahinch Castle. Bottom right: World-class music performances are free in every possible pub and venue during the Annual Guinness Jazz Festival in Cork. This trombonist is a member of the Brooklyn-based band "The Clubs" and was also the groom from the wedding we attended—a special treat!



Some highlights of our trip included: complimentary "welcome" gin and tonics at The Wilder House in Dublin and incredible breakfasts, included with the cost of the room. Everything about Ballynahinch Castle, an under-the-radar paradise managed by Relais & Chateaux—rooms, property, food, amenities were all spectacular. The Annual Cork Jazz Festival which we attended rivaled the iconic Jazz Fest in New Orleans, with insane crowds, every pub and restaurant filled to bursting, and buckets of



Guinness consumed per person that were beyond mind-boggling. The emptiness and breathtaking sweep of Achill Island offered once-in-a-lifetime views. Meanwhile, a short drive away, Wexford, voted Ireland's prettiest town, offered picture-perfect streets, shopping, and international eateries like an award-winning Nepalese restaurant in a converted church. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Giant's Causeway was a place not-to-miss. A double rainbow at the nearby ruin of Dunluce Castle was a super

bonus. (Pro tip: make sure to stay overnight at the Bushmills Inn, and tour the oldest whiskey distillery in Ireland—amazing.)

The wedding was fabulous of course—in a gorgeous manor house in the center of Ireland, with fantastic flowers, fabulous food (including the biggest oysters I have ever seen), great music, and so much love. We haven't reviewed the cost of the trip and don't even care. It was a short, inexpensive flight from Atlanta to Dublin and nothing but wonder when we were there. We can't wait to go back!

Livin’ Large: Big Bottles and Box Wines

By Alexis Douglas,
certified sommelier

Parties/houseguests/entertaining... sometimes you need quantity AND quality.

If large-format bottles make you think cheap or unattainable or expensive, and box wines are reminiscent of your grandma’s Riunite-on-ice (so nice), know that times have changed. Sure, you can find giant bottles of Barefoot and boxes of Franzia at the grocery store, but I’m referring to the new era of boxes and big bottles. They’re better for the environment, your wallet, and will please a range of palates.

A (good) large-format bottle is also an impressive and festive addition to a dinner party or a fabulous gift, as they are more rare. A benefit of box wine is that the wine can keep for months after opening due to the oxygen displacement in the “bladder” inside the box. The key to finding quality wines (in general) is to shop at a specialty wine store/section. Here are some great quality examples, organized by size (all available at Classic Wine Co., Homewood. Keep in mind a standard bottle of wine is 750 ml):

1.0L size (top right):

- Gulp Hablo White, Spain \$16.50
- Ercole Rosato, Piedmont, Italy \$15
- Gulp Hablo Red, Spain \$17.50

All three of these wines are easy drinking, fruity, lively, and unique.

1.5 L/Magnum (two bottles; at right):

- Raventos i Blanc “de Nit” Cava Rose, Spain \$65. A fabulous alternative to Champagne.



- La Vieille Ferme White, France \$15. Always an amazing value. Light, refreshing, unoaked and versatile.
- Portal da Calçada Rose, Portugal \$25. Lively, dry and easy to pair with a variety of foods.
- Saint Cosme Cotes du Rhône Red, France \$35. My red choice for Thanksgiving this year. Surprisingly complex, with rich fruit and pleasant spice.

Box wines (3.0L = 4 bottles; at right)

- Quadrum White, Spain \$22 A refreshing and aromatic blend of Verdejo and Sauvignon Blanc.
- La Nevera Rose, Spain \$22 Dry, fruity and delicious.
- Vignes des Lumieres Cotes du Rhône Red, France \$30 Incredible value for this rustic, spicy blend. Also a great base for batches of Sangria!
- La Vieille Ferme White, Rose, and Red (at right) are widely available in 1.5L bottles for around \$15 and 3.0L boxes for \$24.99—both are at Whole Foods. All three “flavors” of this wine have been my go-to recommendation for years for an inexpensive quality wine for parties, weddings, and large gatherings.

Cheers and happy holidays!



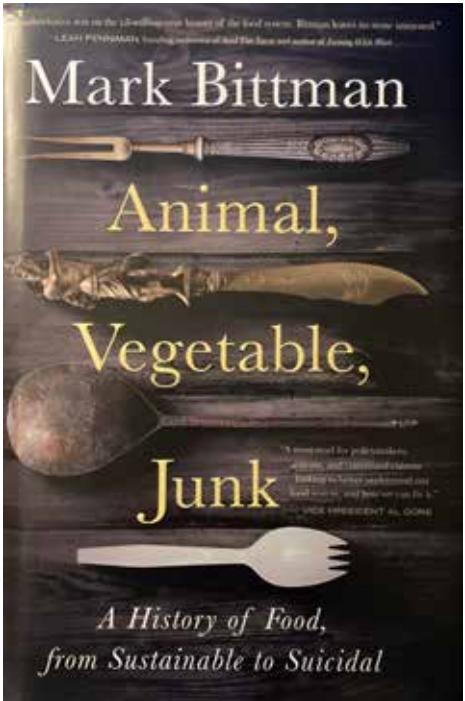
Book Review: Animal, Vegetable, Junk

By Margaret Ann Snow

Mark Bittman, most famous for his cookbooks, has written a non-fiction book on the history of agriculture and food production in the United States. *Animal, Vegetable, Junk* is the story of our food journey, both globally and as a nation.

The book is organized into three parts: The Birth of Growing, The Twentieth Century, and Change. Part One begins at the beginning, the introduction of agriculture 10,000 years ago. I was momentarily taken aback when he offered a current consideration that agriculture is responsible for many of the most egregious human behaviors: colonialism, slavery, environmental degradation, and more. He cites Jared Diamond’s article The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race, as well as a quote from the well-received book *Sapiens* by Yuval Noah Harari, to back this up. I have been pondering this idea, and my own role in it, ever since.

He moves on to how agriculture evolved from small, personal farms to row after row of monocrops not fit for human consumption, covering much along the way. I thought I would have to read several scholastic tomes to gather the information Bittman provides in this cohesive narrative of our relationship with food and agriculture. He has sifted through countless books and articles, including an extensive index and the opportunity for the reader to delve deeper into any subject if they wish.



He recounts when the deep-rooted buffalo grasses of the Great Plains were cleared to make more fields for agricultural production, this led to the Dust Bowl. Many of the affected farmers had taken out loans to pay for land and expensive equipment, promises of high yields that never came to be. They were essentially kicked off the land and bankrupted as a result. Of the Green Revolution he says “The field had become a factory, agriculture an industry,” later stating the argument quite clearly that “most benefits of expanding agricultural production went to equipment manufacturers, chemical producers, and seed companies.” Our actions have global ramifications in agriculture. NAFTA notoriously put millions of substance farmers out of work in Mexico.

The greatest portion of the book is devoted to the American diet, processed foods, and the intense marketing of unhealthy foods, beginning with the time before regulations.

“Milk, for example, was often watered down, thickened with starch or plaster of Paris, and finally preserved with formaldehyde. Mushrooms were bleached, peas were kept green with copper sulfate (a pesticide), flour mixed with sand, and bread was baked with sawdust.”

He moves on to manufacturers deciding to add sugar to everything, the introduction of high-fructose corn syrup, and the ‘bliss point’, which is the “precisely calibrated optimal meeting place of sweetness and/or savoriness and/or richness, the combination of sugar, salt, fat, and ‘flavoring’ most likely to produce a state of euphoria”. It is engineered through tests and measurements and analyzing neurological data, but chefs and cooks know this through more natural means, through working in their own kitchens, tasting and adjusting recipes to find said ‘bliss point’. Manufactured food is one of the biggest health problems we have. Bittman argues that sugar is the tobacco of the twenty-first century and states that one-third of Americans now eats fast food daily.

The first two parts of the book tell us everything that is wrong with our current food system and how it came to be this way. Some of this

I knew, some is new. All of it is interesting and insightful. In the conclusion, Bittman states that “There is no end to this story.” He offers some suggestions and examples of where the system is functioning a bit better. I can feel in his writing the same frustration that I feel in my daily life with a food system that supports corporations over people. He makes incredible arguments that the seed corporations, equipment manufacturers, industrial agricultural chemical producers, animal feed producers, and meat-processing plants are the only ones benefitting in our current system. Farmers and consumers suffer, but the corporations in the middle make billions.

So, what do we do? There are suggestions offered. Farms like my own being one, but I know the inside story. There needs to be significant changes in what kind of food production is encouraged and what is not. There is no easy answer, but I think we are all resisting when we sit around a table to share a meal, sourced and prepared thoughtfully, with people we love. The writing of this book, and the reading of it, is resistance as well.

Letter, continued from page 1

On October 1st, we exceeded expectations at the annual Champagne & Fried Chicken Fundraiser, with, compared to last year—more baskets sold, more funds raised, more Dames participating, and more guests staying for the party. Another home run for LDEI!

Later in October, Dames were front and center at FOOD+ Culture Fest, helping launch a new food festival for Birmingham that will grow bigger and better every year.

Three top Dames traveled to the LDEI Annual Conference in New York, to learn from other chapters and make sure the larger membership knows what a committed, creative, and badass group we are. (They are paying attention!)

Hard-working Dames have continued to volunteer at the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama one day a month, so that all members of our community can have enough to eat. In the spring, we’ll partner with the Food Bank for their annual fundraiser

and gala to grow this outreach even more.

Now we’re in the season of thanks and giving. We are all slammed with work and family. But we will still make time to gather, drink, and dine in our Dames’ establishments, and support each other in every way we can. Wrapped up presents are not necessary because our love, friendship, and presence for each other are constant and unwavering.

I’m so honored and proud to be leading this extraordinary group of 92 amazing women as your new president and can’t wait for what is to come. I thank each of you for your support and pledge to give as much as I can to this organization and our community. I challenge each of you to do the same. We are #womensupportingwomen. Working together and building partnerships, we will transform our city and community for the better. I am thankful for the opportunity and excited for what is to come.

With love and gratitude,
Leigh Sloss-Corra

.....Events Calendar.....

Thursday, Jan. 19	noon to 1 p.m. Merrill Lynch Office 569 Brookwood Village, Suite 501	Financial planning for women with Julie Helmers and Philippe Lathrop
Saturday, Feb. 11	Pepper Place	Sweet Treats Valentine’s fundraiser
Monday, Feb. 27	Café Iz	Get Involved Social Planning Kick-off for Champagne & Fried Chicken 2023
Saturday, March 4	Warehouse of the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama	2nd Annual Feast for Hope

Let's Toast

Gia McCollister,

baker and cake designer, has introduced a new porcelain collection inspired by her sugar craft expertise and her own garden. Several of her pieces were featured in the November/December 2022 issue of *Birmingham Home & Garden*. Gia will be using part of the proceeds from this porcelain line to fund an orphanage in Peru.



Christiana

Roussel was recently invited to join the Industry Advisory Board for the Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management at Auburn University. In this three-year term, Roussel will be bringing her network of contacts, industry connections and experience to benefit the students in this world-class program.



Tina Liollo opened "Tennie's Take-Home Market" in Mountain Brook Village on November 17. The small market will carry scratch-made take and bake meals many of which she grew up eating and cooking with her Greek and Sicilian family. Currently she has Greek Chicken & Rice, Lasagna, Greek Green Beans and Spanakopita. There are also a variety of treats from other local female-owned businesses.



Some of our members gathered to support the launch of Dame Gia McCollister's new porcelain collection. All photos by Simple Dave Photography.

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Leigh Sloss-Corra, Margaret Ann Snow, Susan Swagler, and Jan Walsh.