



Les Dames d'Escoffier
INTERNATIONAL



Founded in 2013

Ideibirmingham.org

Summer 2023

President's Note

Dear Dames,

I was in an LDEI Presidents' meeting recently where the topic was succession planning and how chapters ensure they have a strong Board and leadership that looks to the future. Some chapters are on the new side and still figuring things out. Others are older and either struggling with fatigue and burnout or thriving thanks to good policies; organized, hard-working members; and probably a little luck. Our chapter is one of the healthy ones, with engaged and active members, diversity in every sense, and enough going on so everyone has a chance to shine. We've come a long way in 10 years. Wait—10 years? Did you get that? 2023 is our 10th Anniversary! Now we really need to celebrate!

So what have we achieved in the past 10 years? Where do I start? Our chapter was founded in August 2013, the first in Alabama. We had the highest number of members for a new chapter—55. In August we'll probably vote in enough new members to bring the count to 100. Birmingham is not a very large city, and yet we have frequently attracted the attention of other chapters, including LDEI's executive leadership, and for good reason.

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Celebrating Our Grant and Scholarship Winners



by Jessica Bennett

Birmingham Botanical Gardens' Hill Garden was decked in Les Dames blue on May 21st, as Birmingham Dames gathered to award \$38,000 to grant and scholarship winners. President Leigh Sloss-Corra lauded the ceremony as being the culmination of the year's hard work raising funds. Dame

Anna Theoktisto, grant and scholarships committee chair, awarded \$12,000 in scholarships to students in four-year programs and \$3,000 in scholarships to students in two-year programs. Four scholarship winners were present to accept awards. Addie Spruiell, currently at the University of Alabama, and

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Mackenzie Freeman, currently at Jacksonville State, represented four-year scholarship winners. Otisha Hayes and Giovanna Vazquez, both at Jefferson State, accepted awards as two-year scholarship winners.

Entrepreneurial Grants totaled \$23,000, with four entrepreneurs at the event to accept awards. Sophie Burge Dolan of Sophie Dolan Nutrition LLC pledged to use the money to reach a wider audience by expanding her ability to accept insurance, a hurdle of her industry. HoneyPop's Titania Adams will continue to explore food as a creative medium by using funds to expand her product line, increase community involvement, and provide education for food as artistic expression. Vasilisa Strelnikova, recently relocated to Birmingham from Ukraine, discussed how she turned a new hobby in a new city into a business with Cake Honeys. Ama Shambulia plans to update and increase infrastructure on her homestead, the site of A Beautiful Life Enterprises, with a commitment to community whole-food education. Ama was awarded the Food Bank Scholarship in addition to her entrepreneurial grant.

A champagne reception followed on the patio of The Gardens Café. Dames and their guests enjoyed French crémant, charcuterie, and cheeses, courtesy of Dame Kathy G Mezrano and her team.

Meet the Grant Winners

Sophie Burge Dolan Sophie Dolan Nutrition LLC, \$5,000 Grant

Sophie Dolan is a registered dietitian nutritionist born and raised in Birmingham. She went to undergraduate at Auburn and did her dietetic internship at UAB. She completed her MS in nutrition sciences at UAB as well.

She worked clinically for the past eight years and just recently moved back to Birmingham and started her own private practice, Sophie Dolan Nutrition. Sophie lived in Boston and worked at Boston Children's Hospital for six years in their gastrointestinal, surgery, and endocrinology departments, caring for a large variety of patients. Sophie Dolan Nutrition specializes in gastrointestinal disorders and weight management concerns for pediatrics and adults.



She currently provides one-on-one nutrition counseling and education. Sophie has exciting plans for expanding her business in the coming year. In her free time, she teaches dance fitness classes, enjoys cooking, traveling, and spending time with friends and family. Fun fact: Sophie is expecting her first little babe in June!



Ama Shambulia A Beautiful Life Enterprises LLC, \$5,000 Grant

(recipient of The Community Food Bank of Central Alabama grant award)

Chef Ama 'Ifabagmila' Shambulia is a native Angelean (Los Angeles, California) where her love of cooking and gardening was nurtured in her "Granny's" kitchen and beautiful backyard flower gardens.

She has lived in Birmingham for over 30 years and is the owner and operator of A Beautiful Life Enterprises LLC. She has a passion for sharing whole-food, plant-based nutrition. Committed to holistic life principles over an expansive career as a natural foods chef, wellBEing coach, biodynamic gardener, and 'herban' homesteader, she has combined these passions to become an educator and advocate for wellness in Birmingham communities and beyond.

Sarah Cole
Abadir's, LLC, \$5,000 Grant
Sarah Cole is a chef and good-food advocate. The Alabama Black Belt native is the owner and creative force behind Abadir's, a purpose-driven eatery celebrating Cole's half-Egyptian, half-Southern heritage and her passion for feeding people good food. Established in Greensboro in September 2020, Abadir's quickly gained attention for its food, flavors, and down-to-earth style, earning recognition in national publications, such as *Garden & Gun*, *Cherry Bombe*, *Gravy* by the Southern Foodways Alliance, *Taste of the South*, and more. The small, minority woman-owned business has also been featured on Alabama Public Television's Monograph series as well as the Rachael Ray Show.

Cole created Abadir's as a dedication to her native region and is currently in the process of establishing a collaborative "good food space" in downtown Greensboro where Abadir's will offer more regular hours for its community, all while creating engaging and educational food-based programs with regional and national chefs and educators. The business is



also working to expand its creative reach through house-made items like spice blends and cake mixes.

In addition to Abadir's, Sarah runs Black Belt Food Project, a 501c3 nonprofit focused on food access and food education. Prior to her food career, Cole worked as a photojournalist for *The Huntsville Times* and *The Anniston Star* and then later as the media director for Lowe Mill ARTS & Entertainment in Huntsville. Before moving to Greensboro, Cole helped grow a struggling farmers' market into a thriving community gathering all while serving as a program assistant for the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



Vasilisa Strelnikova Cake Honeys, \$4,000 Grant

Hello! My name is Vasilisa Strelnikova and I have recently relocated here from Ukraine. I've always loved baking but never had enough time for my hobby and never thought that someday it would become my business! I started baking here in Birmingham because I wanted to share something I love with my friends. Also it was very comforting to do what I enjoy doing. Now my honey cake is known and loved by so many people! I can't express how happy I am to know that what I do makes other people's lives a little sweeter!



Titania Adams HoneyPop Poppin Gourmet Popcorn, \$4,000 Grant

Dr. Titania Adams is a long-time entrepreneur and product management maven. Her latest venture, HoneyPop Poppin Gourmet Popcorn located in Montgomery Alabama, is a gourmet popcorn and sweet treat experience that you might not know you were missing.

HoneyPop Poppin's ever-expanding flavor recipes and products mean that whether you are looking for gourmet popcorn, sweet treats, party favors, snacks, or popcorn-related products HoneyPop Poppin' Gourmet Popcorn is the answer. Dr. Adams is on a mission to create and support others in building masterpieces beginning with a blank canvas.

Meet the Scholarship Winners



Julia (Jewel) Krings

Hospitality Management major at Auburn University, \$3,000

My name is Jewel Krings, and I will be entering my final year at Auburn University this upcoming semester. I am studying hospitality management with a focus on events and a minor in business.

In the future, my hope is to be an event coordinator at a farm-to-table venue because it combines my passion for serving others and my love of agriculture. A fun fact about me is that I am a member of Auburn's club swim team and placed 3rd in an event at Nationals this April. I am extremely grateful for being selected as a scholarship recipient. Thank you for this honor!



Catherine Brown

Hospitality Management major at Auburn University, \$3,000

My name is Catherine Brown, and I am a junior at Auburn University majoring in hospitality management on a hotel-restaurant management track. In addition to my major, I am pursuing a double minor in business and finance.

I am originally from McLean, Virginia, just outside Washington D.C., and loved growing up near a big city. On campus, I am involved with the Women in Business Club, Society for Human Resource Management, as well as Tri Delta, my sorority on campus. Additionally, I am a student ambassador for the Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management.

Following graduation, I hope to work in hotel front desk management. Later in my career, I would like to become a hotel director of finance, combining my passion for numbers and guest operations. A fun fact about me is I love traveling and have been lucky enough to visit 16 different countries!



Mackenzie Freeman

Family and Consumer Science major with a concentration in Dietetics at Jacksonville State University, \$3,000

My name is Mackenzie Freeman. I am a student at Jacksonville State University working towards my Bachelor of Science in family and consumer science with a concentration in dietetics.

Throughout my college career I have worked in the food-service industry and as a nanny to three children. I am hoping to pursue my master's and become a registered dietitian. This scholarship is going to allow me to continue my education in the area of dietetics. It will provide an opportunity for me to volunteer in the food pantry on campus more frequently and get involved in the local WIC program. My hope is that with my education I will be able to improve the overall nutrition of individuals struggling with food-related disorders. Fun fact: I like to spend my free time walking my dog and cooking.



Addie Spruiell

Hospitality Management major at the University of Alabama, \$3,000

My name is Addie Spruiell, I was born and raised in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. I am currently a junior at the University of Alabama, preparing to enter my senior year. My major is hospitality management with a concentration in sport entertainment and event management.

I am currently a student assistant for Alabama Football, working alongside the associate directors of recruiting and operations. I have the privilege of gaining experience and learning from some of the best professionals when it comes to athletics and hospitality.

When it comes to career aspirations, I hope to expand my knowledge of events and operations to either a collegiate or professional team. As a fun fact and an update on some of my future endeavors, I was recently accepted into the Accelerated Master's Program for Sports Management and will begin graduate classes this fall, while still working towards my undergraduate degree. I am beyond grateful to the Les Dames d'Escoffier chapter and look forward to expanding my network and knowledge of the hospitality industry. Roll Tide!



Otisha Hayes

Baking and Pastry major at Jefferson State Community College, \$1,000

My name is Otisha Hayes, and I attend Jefferson State Community College. I am pursuing an associate degree in baking and pastry. This is a major career change for me, as I have a background in social work.

I had been longing to find something I was passionate about and found it during a painful time in my life. Baking has saved me in so many ways. I decided I wanted to gain more knowledge and attend school. I want to make my hobby of baking into a business and teach others this beautiful craft.

My long-term goal is to become an instructor and be an example to other women wanting to pursue a career in the hospitality industry. A fun fact about me is that I don't mind singing randomly at work while working back of house.



Giovanna Vazquez

Culinary Nutrition major at Jefferson State Community College, \$1,000

Hello, my name is Giovanna Vazquez. I am currently a student at Jefferson State Community College, majoring in culinary and nutrition science management. After Jefferson State, I plan to further my education at the University of Montevallo under the coordinated program in dietetics.

One of my career goals includes maintaining a business of my own. I would like to have the business incorporate everything I have learned throughout my education and experience.

One fun fact about myself is that I like to learn in any way possible, whether it is through school, finding different hobbies, or people!

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Aubrey Roe Culinary Arts, Baking and Pastry major at Jefferson State Community College, \$1,000

My name is Aubrey Roe. I am 18 years old and a freshman at Jefferson State Community College, majoring in baking and pastry.

I own my own home bakery that I have had since I was 12 years old, which is located on our farm in Boaz, AL. I plan on saving money and using what I've learned through college to prepare me for owning my own business.

My long-term goal is to one day own my own bed and breakfast with a bakery, deli, and coffee shop in it.

Gear Up for Champagne & Fried Chicken 2023!

by Martha Johnston

Kathy G. Mezrano is enthusiastic about making our 2023 Champagne & Fried Chicken fundraiser on Sunday, October 1, bigger and better than ever. And she wants every Dame to get involved.

On Thursday, June 15, a chapter planning session was held at the Kress Building where members met to share their ideas.

Once the concept is in place and the goals set, Dames will break into committees to work on other details and deadlines.

Here's how you can get involved to help make our signature event one of Birmingham's best to attend:

• **Consider how you want to serve.** There are lots of committees that will accommodate all schedules.

The pre-packaging committee will meet ahead of the event as will the flower committee. The Dames producing food will need help in their kitchens, too.

We will need greeters on the day of the event to talk to guests when the cars occasionally back up. We will need quick, reliable check-in people to help make the day go smoothly. (Also, please note that this year everyone—including Dames—will need to go through

the pick-up line or send a representative; there will not be a separate place for Dame baskets.)

We definitely will need people to get there early on Sunday and help set up tables and chairs for the party and hang signage.

We had quite a few people park and walk up for their baskets last year, so we will need people to safely escort them down the pick-up line. Of course, our tents will need to be staffed. And we will have Dames at the street party to assist guests there.

Email Kathy G once you decide so you can be connected to the right committee.

• **Pursue sponsorships.** Everyone already has gotten the lovely sponsorship materials, and everyone is encouraged to send them to potential sponsors. Email Martha Johnston if you have questions. And please email her and Idie Hastings before reaching out to a potential sponsor so we don't overlap and overwhelm them.

• **Encourage people to purchase raffle tickets.** They will be available when the fundraiser website launches on August 1.

Find your place. You have a place! It takes all of us to make this street party successful!

More Than Just a Distributor

Dames tour Sysco and learn how that company helps its customers.

by Susan Swagler

There's more to Sysco than food distribution. That was the takeaway after Dames and guests toured the Sysco warehouse in Calera and spent time in Dame Lindsey Noto's company kitchen. Chef Noto is the Culinary Specialist at Sysco.

Dames toured the huge (mostly refrigerated facility) and learned how foods are gathered, transported, stored, and distributed. They heard about the company's partnership with the food rescue initiative Feed-BHM and The Community Food Bank of Central Alabama. And they learned about the value-add business resources that Sysco offers its customers. The "Running a Restaurant Playbook" offers handy checklists for new restaurants for front of the house, back of the house, managers, HR, and hiring processes. She showed us how restaurant owners can order easily with the Sysco Shop, how they can price out menu items (to the penny!) using the Sysco Studio web pages, and the various food trends highlighted in the company's *Edge* publication.

The Dames all gathered in the kitchen (a bistro space where Noto plans to incorporate a bodega of sorts to showcase specialty food items from Sysco). They enjoyed wine and watched Noto cook.

Noto shared bites of some of her favorite foods—many are designed to be easy and superfast to serve (with little-to-no learning curve for restaurant staff). We enjoyed a summer burrata salad with melon, toy box heirloom tomatoes and fresh mint; smooth Mezete hummus drizzled with lemon olive oil and served



Above: Chef Lindsey Noto welcomed fellow Dames (and a few guests) to her bistro kitchen at the Sysco warehouse in Calera.

At right: Noto topped ready-made hummus with crispy, spiced chickpeas, quick-pickled red onions and fresh cucumber.



with caramelized onion naan; grilled chicken satay (no labor other than cooking required for the restaurants!) with a ready-made peanut sauce; Reuben spring rolls; savory cheeseburger puffs; crispy corn ribs

with maple crema and jalapeño sauce; and lemon-blueberry cookies, macaroons, and gelato.

The program—organized by Dame Maureen Holt—was delicious and entertaining and highly informative.

Welcomed Like Family

Auburn University made Birmingham Dames feel right at home with a tour of the new Culinary Science Center.

by Susan Swagler

During our visit to the Tony & Libba Rane Culinary Science Center at Auburn University, we kept hearing that this place is “the crossroads between campus and community.”

In truth, with state-of-the-art and beautiful school facilities (much open to visitors and the surrounding community), comprehensive educational programs in both hospitality management and culinary science, and the hotel and its restaurant and spa, Auburn has created something that appeals to the entire state, even the entire country. Perhaps the entire world.

The 142,000-square-foot, six-story facility at the corner of East Thach Avenue and South College Street is the first campus building to blend a major academic component with revenue-generating elements.

And, on March 24, a few lucky Birmingham Dames saw how this happens.

We started our day visiting casually with our own Dame Ana Plana, who is a teaching chef in the College of Human Sciences and serves as a lecturer in the Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management. We looked through walls of windows into her food lab where students were hard at work preparing that day’s lesson and lunch. She told us a little about how Auburn partners with the surrounding community for cooking classes, wine tastings and special events. (Another trip to the plains might be in order.)

Then our guide Caitlin Myers, director of community engagement



Birmingham Dames got the opportunity to see and experience the Rane Culinary Science Center at Auburn University, a 142,000-square-foot, six-story facility on campus.

and economic development, started us on our tour. We began with a short introduction to this new enterprise from Dr. Martin O’Neill, the Head of School and the Horst Schulze Endowed Professor of Hospitality Management. He told us about how the educational programs and the hotel and restaurant work in a highly symbiotic way. He talked about the micro-distillery coming later this year. Auburn University is unique in offering two distinct graduate programs in Brewing Science and Operations—a Graduate Certificate and Master of Science program. And he also talked about how much the Auburn family appreciates our partnering with them on LDEI Birmingham scholarships. In fact, a young woman in the very first class in this new program received one of our scholarships.

This year, two Auburn students received \$3,000 scholarships from us: Julia (Jewel) Krings, a Hospitality Management major, and Catherine Brown, who is studying Hospitality Management on a Hotel and Restaurant Management track with a minor in business and finance.

Then we headed into the 1856 restaurant for some nibbles and a taste of the Auburn Spirit—a non-alcoholic blue tea topped with a vibrant dried orange slice and fresh blueberries.

There we heard from master sommelier Thomas Price. (Only 269 people have earned this title worldwide, with 172 in the Americas chapter, and he is the first African American to do so.) The beautiful restaurant welcomes up to 48 guests at a time. There is a private dining room that will accommodate up to 12 people. The restaurant also

features a distinguished “Chef in Residence” program.

From there, Dr. Mark Traylor, associate professor and director of Culinary Science, took us on a tour of some classrooms and labs that offer impressive immersive experiences for students and people from the community. The wine appreciation laboratory and the distilled spirits lab, both outfitted with sinks at the desks, were notable. So was the culinary exhibition laboratory with all its multiple cameras and large white boards and the computer classroom with monitors that rise from desks with a touch of a button.

The students all start in this computer classroom, Traylor says. One of the first things they do is create a blog space, using Wix, that they will utilize for the entirety of their time here—posting about their research and their results. There’s a big emphasis on writing in both the hospitality management program and the culinary schools.

We toured the already-famous hotel rooftop with its gardens of flowers, herbs, and vegetables that the students and chefs pick for the restaurant; its comfortable outdoor seating with firepits; and its unsurpassed views of Auburn’s lovely campus and landmark buildings, including Jordan-Hare Stadium.

Next, we visited Chef Ana Plana’s food labs where students have been cooking globally. When we toured, they were making Persian dishes—kebabs, tahdig (crispy rice), walnut and pomegranate chicken, a salad with mint and watermelon. It’s totally immersive, Plana says. The students study the region, its food, its art, its people, and its customs. They even listen to music from the culture they are studying while they cook. It’s a broad, hands-on, intensive way to learn.



Above: One of the students was busy making chicken with walnuts and pomegranate. At right: Chefs and students pick flowers, vegetables, and herbs from the hotel’s rooftop garden to use in the restaurant.



For lunch, we all headed to the Hey Day Market—so named because of Auburn’s friendly tradition of saying “Hey” to everyone. (It dates to WWII when veterans of that war returned home to the school and friendly places and faces.) The food hall, clearly a popular meeting place, features stalls that are chef-created with nicely curated menus from around the world. The choices were impressive: freshly made tacos; Asian noodle

bowls; burgers; dim sum and banh mi sandwiches; fresh salads and smoothies; Cuban sandwiches; gelato; wood-fired pizzas; and more.

After that, Paul Reggio, managing partner and head of rooms operations, took us on a tour of The Laurel Hotel and Spa (named not for the tree but for the excellence that a wreath of laurel leaves signifies).

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With glasses of a deliciously dry bubbly in hand, we saw how this place operates: Most of the check-in process is done ahead of time; guests just drive up and are escorted straight to their rooms. The typical check-in desk does not exist; there's simply a friendly face at a table in the hotel library if guests need anything. We saw a typical room with its French linens, custom furnishings, and a beautiful bathroom. (We even loved the powder room! The sink and counter were a sparkling single piece of curved glass, and the wallpaper was wonderful.) Each room has the ingredients and a recipe for a seasonal signature cocktail.

We toured areas of the spa next and ended up on the guest and resident side of the rooftop with its huge cabanas, beautiful pool, walk-up bar with nibbles and sweeping views of The Loveliest Village on the Plains.

Our tour ended with little bags of goodies—rooftop herb-infused bath salts from the spa and a tiny vial of zinnia seeds to remember our visit. They even added a marker made from a piece of silverware for our seeds.

Oh, and our valet made sure our vehicles were cooled down and put cold waters inside for our rides home. Truly the attention to detail here is unlike anywhere else.

The day was fun and informative, and (no matter your favorite team) it left us with a sense of pride—pride in Auburn and its family as well as its overall commitment to the students, the guests and our state.

Because this place is bigger than just Auburn. This is the kind of endeavor that has far-reaching social, educational and financial implications—drawing people here from all over the country, all over the world.



Above: Dames ended their tour with one more savory bite at the bar near the rooftop pool. At right: Dame Ana Plana's food labs are an immersive experience. While cooking globally, students study the regions, its food, its art, its people, and its customs.



Wine: Unconventional Pinot Noir Picks

By Alexis Douglas,
certified sommelier

Are you in love with Pinot Noir? Known for being silky, velvety, versatile yet finicky and hard to make, the beloved light red comes in various styles and unusual versions from areas outside the commonly known growing regions of California; Oregon; and Burgundy, France. All of the below choices are available at Greenwise.

Moutard Brut Blanc de Noirs, Champagne, France \$32
True Champagne can be made from any combo of three grapes: Chardonnay (white), Pinot Noir (black) and Pinot Meunier (black). Made from 100% Pinot Noir, this "Blanc de Noirs" (literally "White of Black"—white wine made from black grapes) is approachable and a great value at \$32.

Cavalotto "Pinner" Pinot Nero, Piedmont, Italy \$26
The color of wine is determined by the length of skin contact. White wines can be made from any color grape, since the juice is not left in contact with the skin. This Pinot Noir is a fragrant, medium-bodied white with a rich texture and tell-tale black cherry notes. There are also white Pinot Noir from Oregon: look for Left Coast and Amity Vineyards, both around \$22.

Villa Wolf Pinot Noir Rosé, Pfaltz, Germany \$14
Gorgeous color, with a fragrant nose, packed with strawberry and cherry flavors. Slightly sweet but crisp, bright, and refreshing. Pairs well with a variety of foods. Perfect boat/pool/gardening wine. Look for red Pinot Noir from Germany and Austria as well! They are hard to find but so delicious and rewarding.

Domaine Speck Pinot Noir, Alsace, France \$24
A lovely light, savory, herbal, balanced treat from a region on the Germany border most known for white wines. A must try.

Muri-Gries Pinot Nero, Alto-Adige, Italy \$22
This complex, rustic, medium-bodied Pinot has ripe fruit yet crisp acidity with berry and spicy herbal notes. Fabulous with grilled meats and veggies!

Domaine Riffault Sancerre, Loire Valley, France \$40
Sancerre is known for Sauvignon Blanc, but the rosés and reds from here are made from Pinot Noir! Delicate in body, yet rich in flavor with deep red fruit and black tea notes.



We have a great newsletter! We have systems that work. Our membership is growing, and we like and support each other. We put on unforgettable fundraisers and give away more money than many larger, more established chapters do—this year, over \$40,000! We have created an endowment now, so we can earn more money to give away. Many chapters struggle with diversity of every kind—age, profession, race—but we’re setting a strong example that other chapters want to emulate.

Our calendar is full, and we get requests more and more to partner in ways that challenge, elevate, and advance our members’ businesses and awareness of our chapter. Of course, we still have a lot to learn. But for

a city like ours with a medium-size reputation in the food world, we have developed a giant reputation in the world of LDEI, in not quite a decade.

This year so far, we’ve raised money selling sweets, co-hosted a gala for The Community Food Bank of Central Alabama, had a tequila tasting, and taken field trips to Sysco and Auburn University’s world-class Rane Center. We’ve toasted a Dame’s new cookbook, and celebrated the openings of Dames’ new restaurants, cafés, and shops.

This month, we awarded our highest dollar amount ever in grants and scholarships. That truly is significant, and I am so proud to be part of this amazingly generous group with you.

This summer, we’re getting serious about planning Champagne & Fried Chicken, our big annual fundraiser, happening October 1. We’ll hold our

annual meeting August 14, and everyone will attend because it’s going to be FUN! Our Dames will take over the Pepper Place Farmers’ Market in September, then in October, we’ll hold our fundraiser, converge at the LDEI Annual Conference three days later, and then help with the new FOOD+ Culture Fest happening in Birmingham October 12-15. How do we ever get our regular work done? Fortunately for us and our city, we love to volunteer on LDEI projects and celebrate together.

So, back to our 10th Anniversary. I invite all our members to look for ways to spotlight this milestone in 2023, starting with a birthday cake and a toast at our annual meeting, with more festivities to come. How will YOU celebrate?

Cheers to ten years,
Leigh Sloss-Corra

The Most Exciting Time of the Year is Here! New Member Nominations

by Jan Walsh

By May of each year, I already have several nominees for LDEI in mind. Typically, only one or two can dedicate themselves to becoming a nominee. And I respect the decision to wait until the next year or admit not having time at all to become a member. Thus, the prospective members whom I nominate have been vetted for their

time available to dedicate to our organization. And most often they contribute much to LDEI.

Nominations and recommendation letters were due to Membership Chair LaCrista Hutchinson on June 2. To be considered for membership, nominees must have a minimum of five consecutive years experience in a culinary, hospitality, food, or beverage position. If a candidate’s work

isn’t completely culinary in nature, 75% of her work for those years must be culinary related.

From June 11 until June 25, the Membership Team meets and schedules interviews with potential new members. On July 21, the slate of candidates is presented to the Board for approval. And in August, the slate of candidates is voted on by the general membership at the annual meeting.

Decoding the Les Dames Board and Nominating Committee

by Leigh Sloss-Corra

Our chapter is governed by a group of elected Board members. A nominating committee identifies potential Board members first, then the Board member candidates are voted on by a majority of the chapter members at the August annual meeting. Our Board member terms are two years, but for a variety of reasons, not all terms end the same year. This year, for example, our chapter will vote to fill two Board positions: Vice President of Programs, and Treasurer or Co-Treasurer, and the Nominating Committee begins work on a slate of nominees June 1.

There are very clear rules for how this works that many chapters follow. Here is the skinny: The President—that’s me—appoints a Nominating Committee, which the Board approves. That committee will include the current Chapter President (me), Past President (Kathy G.), a committee chair (Gia), and at least two Dames from the general membership. Those will be Jennifer Yarbrough and Christiana Roussel. On June 1, the Nominating Committee sent out a call for nominees.

Dames can self-nominate, or be nominated by another Dame. There is no form to fill out—an email or phone call will suffice. As nominees are proposed, the committee will review and vet each of the proposed nominees based on availability, interest, and qualifications.

Between July 1 and August 1, the Nominating Committee will present a final slate of candidates, and all members will vote to elect the new Board members

at the annual meeting on August 14.

Being on the Board is one of the best ways to get involved and make a difference in who we are and what we do as Dames. It’s also fun. If you’d like to recommend another Dame or yourself as the next VP of Programs or our next Treasurer, you can let anyone on the committee know before June 30. We look forward to hearing from you all.

Events Calendar

Saturday, June 24	Vestavia Hills Library 10 a.m.	GirlSpring event Must RSVP at www.girlspring.com
Wednesday, July 5	Samford Wellness Kitchen, 11 a.m.–1:30 p.m.	Indian Cuisine Cooking Class collaboration with Sachai Tea Company
August (final date TBD)	More details to come	Favorite Things Party
Every Saturday in September	The Market at Pepper Place	Dames takeover the Market demos
Sunday, October 1	The Market at Pepper Place	Champagne & Fried Chicken fundraiser
Thursday, October 12 - Sunday, October 15	More details to come	FOOD+Culture Fest
Tuesday November 14	5:30 - 7 p.m. Location TBD	Beer Tasting
Monday December 11	Bistro 218 5:30-7:30 p.m.	LDEI Holiday Party

Her Biz is Iz: Kay Reed's Company is in its 23rd Year

By Donna Cornelius

Kay Reed's first job in the food world turned out to be a keeper.

She had never even worked in a restaurant when she started her Iz enterprise, which now includes Iz Café, a neighborhood restaurant of which she's the owner and head chef; Iz Wedding & Events, which offers onsite and offsite catering; Iz Good Stuff, the company's wholesale division.; and Iz the Place, an event space.

"When we started, people said I wasn't going to make it," she said. "And now, we're in our 23rd year." The Birmingham native credits her mother and grandmothers with instilling in her a love for cooking. "Both my grandmothers were wonderful cooks," Kay said. "One was Southern, and one was Italian." Her mom, however, didn't start out as a culinary whiz.

"She couldn't boil water when she and my dad got married," Kay said. "But she got her mother-in-law to teach her, and she became one of the best cooks around."

Growing up, Kay learned her way around the kitchen. "My parents owned a grocery store, so when I was about 12 or 13, my mom would prep the dinner and I'd finish it," she said. "We always had incredible meals. My dad wanted pasta every Sunday. After mass at St. Paul's, we'd stop by Home Baking Company and pick up the bread or rolls."

Kay has fond memories of those family meals. "When we grew up



Dame Kay Reed was a founding member of the Birmingham chapter. Shown here from left to right with Mary Esther Carpenter, Maureen Holt, and Kathy G. Mezrano.

and moved away from home, we'd almost need a written excuse not to come to Sunday dinner," she said.

Kay didn't seriously consider a career in food early on. She worked at the family grocery store and at Parisian, and later she and her brother owned several Head Start salons. But she never lost her love of cooking, and she enjoyed preparing food for family members and friends. So in 1999, she realized her dream of opening a little restaurant: Café Iz.

"My husband said, 'Do you think you can charge for some of that food you're giving away?'" she said.

More than two decades after Iz came into being, Kay says the best part of her job is "watching people enjoy my food. People love to gather around food, and I love serving and feeding them."

A typical day for Kay is—well, rarely typical.

"You map out your day, and then you get to your office and everything goes to pot," she said, laughing. "I had knee surgery recently and haven't been in the kitchen as much. My staff is wonderful, and they picked up the ball and helped me. I've learned that I'm able to step back a minute."

Kay was in on the ground floor with the formation of Birmingham's Les Dames chapter. In 2003, chef Angela Schmidt, who had moved to Birmingham from Atlanta, began gauging interest in forming a chapter here. Kay got on board and became one of its original members. She's a leader and an integral part of LDEI Birmingham's fundraisers, starting with Southern Soirée and now with Champagne & Fried Chicken, and she loves being part of a group of women who support other women.

"Being able to network and talk about business with fellow members is so important," Kay said. "Many of us are competitors, but we're also friends. There's enough business for everybody, and we can help each other. There's just so much strength in our group."

In the early days of Café Iz, she met a writer who would later become her fellow Dame: Susan Swagler.

"Susan was the first person to review my restaurant," Kay said. "I remember her headline: 'What is Iz?'" (If you're wondering, Susan's review was a glowing one.)

Kay's busy, full life is made richer by her family, which includes two sons and three granddaughters.

"My husband and I love spending time with our grandchildren," she said. "And we love to travel." Even when she hits the road, her itinerary wouldn't be complete without a food focus.

"Right now, I'm planning a girls' trip to Fairhope, and I've got the food all mapped out," Kay said.

*About a "typical" day at work:
"You map out your day, and then you get to your office and everything goes to pot."*

—Kay Reed, laughing



Above: For the second annual Feast for Hope Gala, a fundraiser supporting The Community Food Bank of Central Alabama, Kay prepared the first course: smoked salmon with a quail egg in a "tuna can." At right: Kay has been involved in our annual fundraiser from the start, including Southern Soirée in 2019, held at the Barn at Shady Lane.



Curaçao: Beyond the Blue

by Rachel West

The almost-unbelievable colors of the water in Curaçao were, unsurprisingly, what grabbed my attention when I first read about this island in 2015. It is a hyper-distinct memory because I was sick for most of that year with my second pregnancy, so adding it to our travel wish list felt like the tiniest vote of confidence for my post-pregnancy life. Eight years later, I finally got to experience those better-in-real-life blues for myself.

Curaçao is one of the ABC islands—Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao—of the Dutch Caribbean off the coast of Venezuela. It’s a desert-like island with cacti dotting the landscape and is known for its coral reefs, tropical fish, and sea turtles. My family and I spent almost a week there and blissfully had no agenda. Our days were spent swimming, snorkeling, building sandcastles, people-watching, and wildlife spotting. We drove our tiny rental car, amiably called a Picanto, all over the island. Here are some of our favorites:

- Grote Knipe: This beach is my personal favorite—the color of the water here is particularly astonishing. It is a wide beach with calm water, ample areas for snorkeling, and beach chairs with umbrellas for rent. There were wild pigs that were not shy about nosing in anyone’s bags and devouring the food they found. We also spotted gorgeous Venezuelan troupials sitting in the trees nearby and lots of fish and sea life.
- Playa Lagun: This beach sits in a deep cove with cliffs on either



Grote Knipe shows off Curaçao’s beautiful blue waters the best. The color of the water changes depending on where you are—turquoise from some angles and cerulean or baby blue from others.

side. You can rent beach chairs and have lunch or a snack from one of a handful of nearby restaurants, including some cliff-side options. It was here that we first spotted sea turtles in the wild, as well as an extraordinary number of minnows; fish of all kinds, including needle fish; and lots of coral.

- Downtown Willemstad: This pedestrian-friendly capital city is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and its pastel-colored buildings are one of its stand-out features. Those colors are allegedly thanks to the first

governor of the ABC islands, Albert Kikkert. At the time of his arrival, all of the buildings in Curaçao were whitewashed, which Kikkert believed was bad for eyesight and also caused him migraines. He decreed in 1817 that all the buildings must be painted, and the results are now part of its charm.

- The Queen Emma Bridge: This floating pontoon pedestrian bridge spans St. Anna Bay, connecting the Punda and Otrobanda quarters of Willemstad. It is a delight. The only thing better than walking on the



At left: The deep cove of Playa Lagun made it a calm place to swim, snorkel, and lounge. It was off the coast of this beach where we first saw sea turtles in the wild. At right: Walking over the floating Queen Emma Bridge in downtown Willemstad was a delight. At night, the arches are illuminated by colorful lights.

boardwalk-like bridge was seeing the mechanics of how it opens and closes when a boat needs to pass through to the harbor.

- Westpunt: This town on the westernmost part of the island has views that can not be beat. There are a handful of beaches that you can stop at along the way, ranging from sandy to studded with seashells of all shapes. We stopped at a cliffside restaurant called Restaurant Playa Forti, next to the beach of the same name, that not only had a stellar view but also a cliff that is a popular jumping-off spot.
- Hato Caves: These limestone caves on the north side of the island are filled with stalactites and

stalagmites, lots of interesting formations, and some bats. The indigenous Arawaks—who came from mainland South America and settled the island hundreds of years before Europeans arrived—knew about these caves and left their mark on the outside with petroglyphs estimated to be 1,500 years old. But the slaves who were brought to the island were the first people known to actually enter; they used them as a hideout after they escaped captivity, the charred ceilings showing where they gathered and built fires.

In addition to the natural beauty of the island, I was blown away (and envious) of the language skills of the people of Curaçao. Four

languages are spoken there: Dutch, Spanish, English, and Papiamentu, the native language of the island, and everyone seemed to effortlessly switch between them.

There are a couple things to keep in mind. Cruise ships do visit the island, so you might want to check how many passengers will be in port each day and plan your activities accordingly since buses of passengers can easily overwhelm some of the smaller beaches and sites. The sun is intense here, and it rarely rains; we used *a lot* of sunscreen.

Curaçao is a place of striking beauty, with a lot of ways to enjoy—and be in awe of—the natural world. It was undoubtedly worth the wait.

Let's Toast

Laura Zapalowski along with Chef Chris Zapalowski reopened Homewood Gourmet at a new location (2703 Mamie L. Foster Place) in the heart of Homewood on Saturday, May 6.



Crystal Peterson and her mom, Denise Peterson, are thrilled to benefit from a Birmingham City Council grant of \$1.3 million for relocation of Yo' Mama's Restaurant to a 4th Avenue North location that is a larger space with more seating and parking opportunities.



Raquel Ervin opened Smoke Bistro at Birmingham's Pizitz Food Hall on Saturday, May 13. The new concept is an upscale version of traditional soul food with a barbecue flair.



April McClung, owner of Emily's Heirloom Pound Cakes, hosted a grand opening at the new location at 125 Hayesbury Drive, Pelham, on May 17. The company produces over 5,000 packaged slices and hundreds of cakes monthly and ships them all over the U.S. These products are available on Amazon, Walmart.com, and at Sam's Club Roadshows in five states. April was featured on the May 2023 cover of *Business Alabama*.



April McClung, owner of Emily's Heirloom Pound Cakes, was featured on the May 2023 cover of Business Alabama.

Becky Satterfield was voted Best Chef in Vestavia Hills by readers of *Vestavia Hills Magazine's* Best of Vestavia Hills 2023. In addition, Satterfield's was named Best Date Night Restaurant. In the Best Ethnic/Regional Cuisine, Best Margaritas, and Best Cocktail categories, El ZunZun took top honors.



Amy Jason's Cookie Fix in Cahaba Heights was voted Best Sweet Treats winner in the Best of *Vestavia Hills Magazine* Awards 2023.



Geri-Martha O'Hara and her husband, Ryan, held a grand opening at their new Big Spoon Creamery Huntsville location on June 3. This is the third location focused on fabulous ice cream and exceptional hospitality.



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