



Les Dames d'Escoffier  
INTERNATIONAL



Founded in 2013

[Ideibirmingham.org](http://Ideibirmingham.org)

Winter 2021

## President's Note

Dear Dames,

Looking back on this year, I could not be more proud of our Birmingham Les Dames d'Escoffier's Southern Soirée, "Champagne & Fried Chicken" 2021. It more than doubled last year's event of \$60,000. This year we raised \$134,000, which consisted of \$90,500 from sponsors and \$43,000 in sales. And we have a Covid-proof event with our curbside picnic basket.

While at the international conference in San Antonio, other chapters were intrigued by how we executed our Covid-friendly event that raised more money than in previous years. Not only did our revenue increase, we had total participation from our members, whether they donated a restaurant certificate, bought a basket or a cocktail kit, or worked at the event. Every Dame participated in some way.

Thanks to everyone's generous support we can continue our mission to fund the future of food in Birmingham and our state with additional grants and scholarships for women in the industry of food, beverage, and hospitality. We are also able to begin funding our endowment, which will continue

*continued on page 21, see Letter*

## Champagne & Fried Chicken 2021: Together, We Did It!



by Martha Johnston

For Birmingham Dames, there is no such thing as impossible. Despite a pandemic as well as wind and rain on the day of the event, our Champagne & Fried Chicken fundraiser on October 3 was a great success!

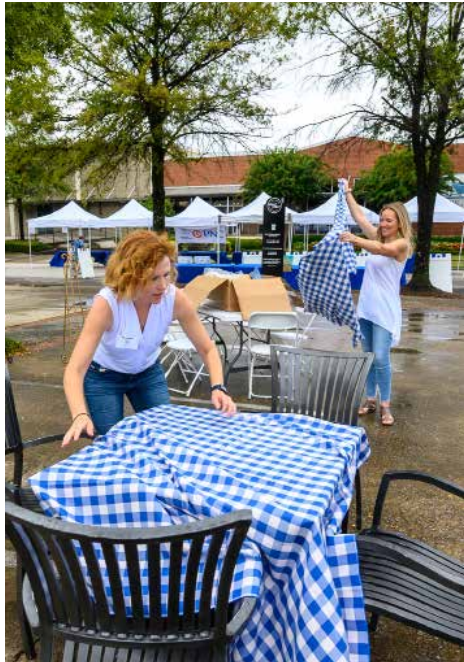
"Birmingham Dames raised over \$135,000, brought in 33 sponsors, and raised our profile locally," said Kathy G. Mezrano, Birmingham chapter president. "I am so proud that all our members participated

in making our goal of increasing scholarships and grants, establishing an endowed fund, and supporting local programming a reality."

Kathy G. Mezrano, Susan Swagler, and Kay Reed set the stage with months of advance planning. Erin Isbell, Barbara Kenyon, and Leigh Sloss-Corra tackled logistics and set-up for the event. Jennifer Yarbrough signed us up on the GiveLively.org website, which is specifically for non-

*continued on page 6, see Fundraiser*









*This is what teamwork looks like! The one thing we all heard from our guests—besides how delicious the food was—is that they felt so welcome and appreciated! A note about those forks on page 6: That was Dame Gia McCollister's way of bringing us good weather. It seemed to work.*





*Fundraiser, continued from page 1*

profits (and takes none of the money we raise). Then she set up an easy-to-use ticketing site. Rachel West created the marketing and promotional materials and event signage. Audrey Pannell stepped in to help with social media. And, no doubt, the publicity generated by Donna Cornelius contributed to our 350 baskets being sold out!

New sponsors and several at the Rehoboam and Jeroboam levels were a result of an extra effort on the part of Idie Hastings, Becky Satterfield, and Pardis Stitt, according to fundraising co-chair Martha Johnston. With that came additional swag for the attendees.

Dames on the kitchen team were remarkable in their ability to fill the baskets in a timely fashion according to chair Kay Reed. At the same time, Charbett Cauthern and the flower team wrapped up beautiful dahlias from Deborah Stone for each guest. And Laura Newman and the cocktail team dazzled attendees with their creativity—they were beautiful and delicious! Well done, Dames!



# The Raffles: A delicious way to raise some money!

A number of local restaurants and businesses helped make our two raffles a hit, including:

**Date Night raffle:**

- Bottaga
- Chez Fon Fon
- Hot and Hot
- OvenBird
- Satterfield's Restaurant
- Village Tavern
- Helen
- Automatic Oysters & Seafood

- The Bright Star
- Jan Walsh  
BirminghamRestaurants.com
- Scrumptious (Stefanie Maloney private chef)
- The Essential
- Sol y Luna
- Bistro 218

Bonus: Wine from Martine's Wines

**Family Night raffle:**

- Urban Cookhouse
- Farm Bowl + Juice Co.

- IZ Cafe
- Dreamland Bar-B-Que
- Ashley Mac's
- Vaughan & Company
- Automatic Oysters and Seafood
- Helen
- The Gardens Café by Kathy G.
- Troup's Pizza
- Southern Graze by Maureen Holt

- El ZunZún
- Bocca Ristorante
- Bonus: \$100 to The Cook Store

# Endowment Update: We're Almost There!

*by Jessica Bennett*

The phenomenal success of our annual Champagne & Fried Chicken fundraiser comes with a significant bonus this year—the potential to establish a financial endowment.

The Endowment Scholarship Fund is a legal framework for managing the money raised for grants and scholarships and is perpetuated through consistent withdrawals from invested capital. Thanks to our efforts this year, we are very close to our goal of \$100,000 for the initial investment. Dames working directly on the project hope to present a plan to the board in the coming months.

The fund represents a different avenue for giving. We will continue to offer our established grants and scholarships, with the endowment providing additional funds as it earns interest. Money from this fund will be generated continuously, a contribution to our efforts that is independent and insulated from much of the uncertainty inherent to annual fundraising alone. It will provide us with a perpetual and lasting resource for giving.

The fund offers another benefit as well; the establishment of an endowment represents an important marker that corporations use to gauge the financial stewardship

and sustainability of our organization. It is a powerful token of credibility, showing that we manage our money well, and making donations more appealing to our sponsors in our future fundraising efforts.

This milestone is the culmination of years of effort from the chapter, the help of friends and sponsors, and the philanthropic nature of Birmingham at large. LDEI Birmingham has given almost \$83,000 in grants and scholarships in seven years. The establishment of the endowment represents a lasting expansion of our capacity to execute our mission, and is an emblem of great things to come.

# Cheers to Our New Members



*When Champagne & Fried Chicken was over, we gathered to toast our new members. You can get to know some of them a little better starting on page 16.*



# Thank You to Our Sponsors!



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and Philippe Lathrop  
& Judy Crittenden



Sloss sisters  
in honor of  
their mother,  
Caroline Sloss



Martha  
Johnston





# Champagne & Fried Chicken was produced in partnership with



## Champagne & Fried Chicken *menu*

**Southern Fried Chicken**  
donated by Evan's Meats

**(vegetarian option)**  
**Vegetable Frittata**  
prepared by Dame Joy Smith  
of Sorelle Café and Catering

**New Potato Salad with Shallot Vinaigrette and Fresh Herbs**  
prepared by Dame Kathy G. Mezrano  
of Kathy G & Co.

**Autumn Salad with Kale, Butternut Squash,  
and Lemon-Balsamic Vinaigrette**  
prepared by Dame Kay Reed  
of IZ Weddings & Events

**Sour Cream Biscuits**  
prepared by Dame Ashley McMakin  
of Ashley Mac's

**Cornbread Muffins**  
prepared by Dame Stacey Craig of The Bright Star

**Fresh pear and Weybridge and Little Hosmer cheese**  
from The Cellars at Jasper Hill Farm

**Honey**  
from Eastaboga Bee Company

**Apple Galette**  
prepared by Dame Kristal Bryant  
of K&J's Elegant Pastries,  
Dame Brittany Cheatham,  
Dame Maureen Holt of Southern Graze,  
and Dame Rebecca Williamson of Holmsted Fines

**Heirloom Southern Pound Cake**  
prepared by Dame April McClung  
of Emily's Heirloom Pound Cakes

**Prince Alexandre Cremant de Loire Champagne**

# Programs Roundup: Cookout, Wine, and Fun

*At right and below right: Our November 14 cookout at Pepper Place featured Flatiron Firepits, sliders made with grass-fed beef from Shipley Farms, wine from the Bernard family of Cotes de Femme and delicious appetizers from Dames Andrea Kirkland, Laura Zapalowski, and Telia Johnson. Below: At a wine tasting on August 29 at The Gardens Cafe by Kathy G., Dame Stefanie Maloney shared the clean-crafted wines of Scout & Cellar.*





# Local Hospitality for a Global Conference

*Birmingham Dames Shared the Best of the Magic City*

by Susan Swagler

When more than 550 guests came to Birmingham, October 22-24, for the 43rd annual conference of the International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP), lots of Birmingham Dames showed them a warm welcome.

From the Sweet Home Street Party to the final goodbyes, we entertained and informed our friends—new and old—about our city and our state and our amazing food scene.

For starters, Cathy Sloss Jones and Leigh Sloss-Corra helped organize the event and welcomed guests to Pepper Place and Sloss Furnaces National Historic Landmark, where most of the conference took place.

Idie Hastings's OvenBird and Hot and Hot Fish Club were popular stations at the Sweet Home Street Party at Pepper Place on Friday night. Deborah Stone's fabulous store at Pepper Place was a hit with conference-goers. And so was Nancey Legg's Better Kombucha. Some Dames were speakers at the conference; Cheryl Slocum talked about writing. Crystal Peterson, of Yo' Mama's, and President & CEO of Sloss Real Estate and Harvard Loeb Fellow Cathy Sloss Jones both shared their food stories during the My Sweet Home Alabama table talk.

Other Dames—including past IACP president Martha Johnston and Pardis Stitt—presented awards during the highly anticipated 2021 IACP Media & Cookbook Awards Ceremony. Mary-Frances Heck had a cookbook in the running there, and she was part of the crowd at the breakfast at Jones Valley Teaching

Farm the next morning. Still other Dames like Ashley McMakin, Rachel West, Allison Lowery, Anna Theoktisto, Christiana Roussel, Anne Cain, and Clara Darling were on hand throughout the weekend to personify the famed Southern hospitality we are known for here in Alabama.

Some of our members participated in the Alabama Tastemakers sessions. Pastry chef Kristen Farmer Hall of Bandit Pâtisserie and The Essential offered a pâte sucrée demonstration. Sprouthouse founder Melany Robinson shared her secrets for building a better brand.

Others, like Kathy G. Mezrano, Susan Swagler, Andrea Kirkland, and Jasmine Smith shared the best of Birmingham's nightlife with a fun bar crawl in downtown Birmingham. And Rita Bernhardt helped feed the crowd a delicious fried chicken Sunday dinner.

The conference was a great mix of information and entertainment with plenty of time to explore our Magic City. The programs were extremely varied and touched on wide-ranging topics—from baking tips to food activists, from diversity to best practices in branding.

One of the most moving programs was a discussion about the history and relationship between food and civil rights with Bryant Terry, author of *Black Food*; Dr. Sephira Shuttlesworth, former teacher, charter school leader, and widow of civil rights icon Fred Shuttlesworth; former Senator Doug Jones, who as a U.S. Attorney brought justice to the crimes of the Sixteenth Street

Baptist Church bombing; and Alabama's Poet Laureate, Ashley M. Jones, the state's first Black poet laureate and the youngest. Janae Pierre, award-winning journalist and local host of NPR's All Things Considered, led this fascinating and important discussion.

There were a variety of field trips offered including a tour of Sloss Furnaces, a bike tour of Birmingham's Civil Rights District, a road trip to Montgomery to visit the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and The Legacy Museum, an introduction to Birmingham's Greek culture at Holy Trinity Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Cathedral, and a tour of Meredith Food Studios.

All in all, it was an engaging conference that showcased the very best and most interesting aspects of our city.

Cathy Sloss Jones said hosting IACP visitors from around the world was inspiring. She added that she was thrilled to share Birmingham with the IACP conference attendees and would like for them to come away from their time here knowing "how special this place is. ... We are deep-rooted, authentic, and food is a big part of it."

"We chose Birmingham for our 43rd conference because the city is one of the three major food media hubs in the country. That's important to our 3,000+ members," says IACP President Nancy Hopkins. "Birmingham is really on the move as an important culinary city—and that's not just for Southern food, but for food, period. The food scene in Birmingham is downright magical!"

# Opa Y'all! Southern Hospitality Greek-Style for IACP

by Sonthe Burge

The Ladies Philoptochos Society from Holy Trinity Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Cathedral, led by Dame Fanoula Gulas and Dame Sonthe Burge, hosted OPA Y'ALL: Southern Hospitality Greek-Style for IACP participants on Monday, October 25.

Participants were welcomed with a Greek yogurt breakfast bar, featuring local honey by Alexis and Pete Pappas. The program included a tour of the Cathedral where Fr. Gregory Edwards, discussed Orthodoxy as a holistic way of living and the importance of food and faith to wellness.

Sonthe Burge, RDN, continued the conversation highlighting the Mediterranean diet and discussing health benefits of plant-based cooking and eating. The day included a hands-on koulourakia baking activity and baklava demonstration by Fanoula Gulas and Stephanie Dikis.

Guests were treated to a true Southern-Greek lunch with Greek salad, spanakopita, tiropita, olives, pasticho, green beans Greek-style, collards from Nikki's West and Fanoula's homemade baklava for dessert.

Author Nicki Sepsis gave a presentation on his book *Hellenic Heartbeat in the Deep South*. The book is a detailed history of Birmingham and how Greek immigrants relied on their love of fine food and hospitality to serve people and establish many restaurants, which we all know and love. Each attendee was given a cookbook, *The Greeks Have a Recipe for It*, printed by The Ladies Philoptochos Society of Birmingham, AL in 1964, along with the koulourakia they made and baked.



Right: The Ladies Philoptochos Society hosted Opa Y'all for IACP participants. Above (left to right): Chum Atkins, Agatha Pihakis, Sonthe Burge, Stephanie Dikis, Hala Valekis, Fanoula Gulas, Rhonda Yearout, and Christine Velezis.



Below: Dame Fanoula Gulas and Stephanie Dikis demonstrated how to make baklava and koulourakia.





# Inaugural Feast for Hope Featuring Les Dames d'Escoffier at Community Food Bank

By Jan Walsh

With a mission of feeding people in need today and fostering collaborative solutions to end hunger tomorrow, the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama is planning its first “Feast for Hope.” The seated dinner will be held at its warehouse on Saturday, March 5, 2022. In the years to follow the Food Bank staff hopes the event will be an annual one.

This special inaugural evening will begin with a champagne tour of the facility via a red carpet. The carpet will lead to stations where volunteers explain how the Food Bank works. Guests will have the opportunity to pack a box or two on the assembly line like we do when we volunteer there.

This visual storytelling will also be on display in the food on the plates. The dishes served at the dinner will be “inspired by” the kinds of items, produce, protein found in the boxes that go to food-insecure families. And all food for the event will be purchased separately from the Food Bank donations.

The Birmingham Chapter of Les Dames d'Escoffier International will assist in developing the menu. And one or more of the Birmingham Chapter's catering Dames will cater the dinner. The show-and-tell will continue with each course with one or more Dames presenting the courses and sharing info about the recipes. Some courses may have wine pairings. And the evening will include videos of some Dames tell-



ing the story of their food involvement and focus on food security. “The culinary experience is the reason people will come,” said Director of Development Nicole Williams. Having the Dames present will exemplify the partnership being created between the two organizations. And to show its appreciation, the Food Bank will donate a \$2,500 scholarship to the Birmingham Chapter.

Feast for Hope should also help raise needed awareness for the Food Bank. “In October, the Food Bank had one million pounds of food come in and one million pounds of food go out into the community. But that still didn't meet the needs,” Assistant Director of Development, Ginger Pegues said. In 2020, 20+ million pounds of food were served to the 12-county area.

Table Sponsor Levels available for Feast for Hope include the following:

- \$25,000 Hunger Hero Sponsor provides 100,000 meals for food-insecure neighbors.
- \$10,000 Platinum Sponsor provides 40,000 meals for neighbors.
- \$5,000 Gold Sponsor provides 20,000 meals for neighbors.
- \$2,500 Silver Sponsor provides 10,000 meals for neighbors.

To date, the Food Bank has sold 20 tables, and they currently are in the United Way blackout period. Efforts to sell tables and sponsorships will pick up by December 1.

Individual tickets, “Friend of the Food Bank” are also available for \$125 per person. The individual tickets will go on sale in January 2022. The event is expected to have approximately 35 tables with 280 guests for dinner.

Visit the Community Food Bank's website for more information [www.feedingal.org](http://www.feedingal.org).



Our chapter regularly volunteers at the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama. In November, Brooke Bell, Sonthe Burge, Susan Swagler, Rosemary Dallam, and Rick Swagler (Susan's husband) spent time packing boxes for Thanksgiving. Our next volunteer day is Wednesday, December 15 from 1-3 p.m.





# Meet Our New Members!

Our chapter gained 14 new members in August 2021. Here, get to know the first eight of these extraordinary women a little better. The other six will be featured in the Spring 2022 newsletter.

## Crystal Peterson

**Place of birth:** Birmingham, AL  
**College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned:** Tennessee State University, civil engineering; UAB, marketing concentration in management  
**Current position:** Co-owner/general manager at Yo’ Mama’s Restaurant  
**How did you get your start?** My mother wanted to open up a family-owned restaurant.



**What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general?**

I love being a servant leader. I love food, and I love people.  
**What does success look like to you?** Finding a healthy balance between my personal life and professional life.

**If you could plan your last meal, what would it be?** Fried chicken, cabbage, sweet potatoes, and mac n cheese. Or pancakes with bacon and a veggie omelette  
**If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do?** I would go to Bora Bora or Aruba and eat all the local cuisine I could.  
**Bonus:** I was in show choir from middle school through high school.

## Rebecca Gann

**Place of birth:** Richmond, VA  
**College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned:** University of Alabama, bachelors degree in marketing  
**Current position:** Owner/founder of Epicurated Concepts, providing contract services in the culinary event production world (food and wine festivals, pop-up dinners, etc.)  
**How did you get your start?** I began my career straight out of college as an event manager for the Atlanta Food & Wine Festival, and eventually worked my way up over a course of five years to programming director overseeing the entire festival.



**What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general?** There are lots of

stories behind food and beverage and the culture and industry that revolve around it. Being able to tell those stories and bring them to life in the form of live events is what I love. Also, I love that my career has enabled me to work with some of the best chefs and beverage professionals in the country, who each have unique stories to tell, and providing that platform for them. In my current position, I love working for myself and the freedom that provides me to really pick and choose and work on projects that I am truly passionate about.

**What does success look like to you?** Success to me is being happy when you go to work each day. Its about the content of your work being something you are truly interested in and passionate about, like food for me.  
**If you could plan your last meal, what would it be?** That’s tough....a 50/50 between a delicious curry (Indian, Thai, African...I love them all) or pasta—specifically spaghetti carbonara.  
**If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do?** I would travel and eat. I would go to a country that I normally wouldn’t be able to visit and one that has a unique culture and cuisine that I normally don’t get to experience first-hand, like Japan.

## Susan Notter

**Place of birth:** Birmingham, England  
**College/professional school/s attended, major/degree earned:** Leicester College of Further Education, Associates Degree in Hotel Management  
**Current position:** Corporate pastry chef, Felchlin Switzerland  
**How did you get your start:** Baking at home  
**What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general:** I love the people, the networking, and the creativity of



I have flexibility with my time and enjoy the independence of my position.  
**What does success look like to you:** Balance! This industry is very demanding and can take over your life. Achieving balance is not easy.  
**If you could plan your last meal, what would it be:** Apple pie and ice

cream with warm vanilla sauce on the side  
the industry. I travel and meet many chefs, I teach and introduce them to new ideas and products.

**If you had one week free and \$5,000 where would you go:** I would fly to England to visit my sister in Wales. I would go hiking and cycling and eat at the local pubs.  
**Bonus:** I enjoy dancing: ballroom, Latin, and swing. I took lessons for many years and did a few competitions. I have competed five times in the Culinary Olympics in Germany. The first time was in 1984; the last time in 2020. I am now the pastry coach for the U.S. Culinary Team.

## Emily Hall

**Place of birth:** Murfreesboro, TN  
**College/school attended:** Samford University, sociology  
**Current position:** Owner of the Breakup Cookie and food stylist at Meredith Food Studios  
**How did you get your start:** I assisted acclaimed food stylist Marian Cooper Cairns for five years.



ever the same.  
**What does success look like to you:** Having the freedom to be more present for my family while engaging in work that feels meaningful and rewarding

**What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry:** It’s very dynamic and no two days are

**If you could plan your last meal, what would it be:** Hamburger and frites from FonFon and a dirty martini  
**One week free and \$5,000, where would you go:** Paris. I’ve never been, and it’s killing me.  
**Bonus:** My husband’s grandfather was the founder of Dreamland BBQ.



# Wesley Lassen

**Place of birth:** Birmingham, AL  
**College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree:** Sweet Briar College, BA in economics with a philosophy minor and a business management certificate  
**Current position:** Owner of The Cook Store in Mountain Brook Village  
**How did you get your start:** I was working at Cacky's as a waitress [now Otey's], got a job in sales and then buying for Pinson Valley Millworks. Moved to Parisian's as a buyer and then found out The Cook Store was going to close. I asked the



previous owner if I could buy it. I've been here ever since.  
**What do you like about**

**your current position and the industry in general?** I love sales. My shop is a fun place to be and come visit. Cooking and entertaining are fun. I love to help people get what they need and want.  
**What does success look like to you:** Paying down my loan to zero at the end of the year is the ultimate success to me!!

**If you could plan your last meal, what would it be:** This is the hardest question of all. I seriously cannot tell you an answer. I love so many wonderful things. Maybe just a BLT on white toasted bread and a bag of chips! Sounds pretty good right now.  
**If you had one week and \$5,000 where would you go:** I would either go to Gubbio or Montepulciano, small towns in Italy, or to St Lucia, the Sugar Beach Resort room 503, I believe!  
**Bonus:** I can't for the life of me crack or flip an egg! I also can't peel a boiled egg. I love eggs but they don't like me! Ha!

# Nancey Legg

**Place of birth:** Birmingham, AL  
**College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned:** University of Alabama at Birmingham, B.S. psychology, Master's public health  
**Current position:** Owner/founder at Better Kombucha  
**How did you get your start:** I began making kombucha as a healthy alternative for my family, and in 2015 I introduced Better Kombucha to the local community at the West Homewood Farmers' Market, a small weekly summer market. Folks showed up thirsty and began recommending my kombucha to their favorite gathering places. Based on this initial response, I decided that my commitment to



wellness and community create a great opportunity to pursue launching the Better Kombucha brand full time.

**What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry:** I love meeting new people, brainstorming/problem-solving and introducing folks to kombucha.  
**What does success look like to you:** Success to me looks like leading my team well while making the best-tasting, highest-quality kombucha possible.  
**If you could plan your last meal, what would it be:** Some of the best food I've ever had came alongside some of my favorite experiences.

So, for my last meal, I'd have skillet mac & cheese from Farmstead Market in Napa, Murder Point oysters with lots of horseradish and lemon, paella and roasted fish from Curate in Asheville, NC, and a browned butter pecan ice cream sammie from Big Spoon.  
**If you had one week free and \$5,000, where would you go:** If I had one week, I'd travel to Costa Rica with my husband, enjoy the Pacific Ocean, rain forests, local people, and all the fresh food we could eat.  
**Bonus:** Before beginning a business, I home-educated children... all of whom are now functioning adults in society. One is a stay-at-home mom and writer; another is a baker and nutritionist. The other is an architect.

# Jessica Bennett

**Place of birth:** Morgantown, WV  
**School/s Attended:** Alabama School of Fine Arts, visual arts specialty  
**Current position:** Aviné Caviste and Social, bar manager/chalk art aficionado  
**How did you get your start:** I took my first job at a tiny, and now defunct, music venue billing itself as a listening room experience. They weren't kidding either...a guest caught talking over the musicians would forfeit their ticket price and be asked to leave! I worked the ticket booth and the espresso machine, as I was too young to sell the more sophisticated beverages. Halcyon



**the industry:** Aviné allows me to work very closely with wine in a dynamic way. I can present a guest with something as timeless and elegant as Sancerre or something as esoteric as Carcavelos, a miniscule wine region barely clinging to the tip of Portugal. The level of engagement is as simple or complex as we choose from moment to moment. We are seeing new interpretations of ancient processes in the popularity of natural and skin contact

days for a nineteen-year-old artist.  
**What do you enjoy about your current position and**  
**What does success look like to you:** I find that broader success accumulates automatically when I focus on daily success, often something as simple as introducing someone to a new favorite or a fantastic pairing.  
**If you had one week free and \$5,000, where would you go:** Reykjavik!  
**Bonus:** I'm a painter, printmaker, musician, and writer.

# Eileen Hallmark

**Place of birth:** Sylacauga, AL  
**College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned:** Auburn University, BS business management  
**Current position:** East Coast Regional Manager, Martine's Wines  
**How did you get your start?** My mother owned a wine distribution business in North Alabama and passed away my senior year in college, so I owned a wine distribution business at 20.



**What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general?** People...different cities, different states, different vibes, different culinary scenes  
**What does success look like to you?** Happy customers  
**If you could plan your last meal, what would it be?** That is like asking a parent who their favorite child is.  
**If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would**

**you go and what would you do?** I would go to Honolulu, Hawaii (where I used to live) and visit with my old friends, snorkel, hike, and eat all the things Hawaii has to offer.  
**Bonus!** I have been blessed to travel all around the world in the wine business. The most beautiful country I have ever seen is South Africa followed by New Zealand. Once on a South Africa trip I tacked on a personal trip by myself to Zimbabwe to see Victoria Falls. The airport was the size of a small gas station, but Victoria Falls is one of the most magical things I have ever seen.



# Steals vs. Splurges: Holiday Edition

By Alexis Douglas,  
certified sommelier

During the busy holiday season, we carve out time for holiday cheer and celebrations with friends and family. But it can be overwhelming to know what wines to serve or choose for gifts! Here’s a quick list of my picks for “steals” and “splurges” in each major category of wine types. Steals are great values and price points for serving at a holiday gathering, while splurges are meant more for gifting. I found all of the wines listed below at Greenwise in Mountain Brook Village. They have an incredible selection (at great prices, by the way) of half- and large-format bottles, and both everyday and rare/ hard-to-find wines.



### Bubbles

Steal: Gruet Brut, New Mexico \$15.99  
Delicious for serving straight up in a flute, and won’t break the bank to use for bubbly cocktails.  
Splurge: Pierre Gimonnet Blanc de Blancs Brut, Champagne \$46.25  
A traditional style, complex yet well-balanced. If the occasion calls for true Champagne, this one is

a gorgeous choice for a “grower” Champagne (basically, small production and fab quality without the flashy price tag of the big producers)!



### Light White

Steal: Kysela Picpoul de Pinet, France \$11.25  
A more interesting choice than the go-to Pinot Grigio, this is absolutely delicious and a crowd-pleaser.  
Splurge: L’Alpage Fendant, Switzerland \$24.25  
Gorgeous label, interesting wine. Similar to a richer style of Sancerre.



### Rich White

Steal: Copain Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast, CA \$14.25

Small producer, balanced style, incredible price while it lasts (normally runs around \$22)!  
Splurge: Hamilton Russell Chardonnay, Hemel-en-Aarde, South Africa \$39.99  
Rich, buttery, yet balanced. An impressive gift for wine lovers who normally gravitate toward big, oaky, California Chardonnay.



### Light Red

Steal: Mas Donis Old Vine Garnacha/ Syrah, Montsant, Spain \$14.49  
Spanish wines are always incredible values, and this one does not disappoint! Tasty, juicy, and complex.  
Splurge: Failla “Seven Springs” Pinot Noir, Eola-Amity Hills, Oregon \$52.50  
Failla makes terrific Sonoma Coast and Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (which are blends of different vineyards), but their single vineyard Pinot Noirs are more complex, expressive, and a treat. There are several different single vineyard selections available at slightly different price points. They are delicious to drink now or they can be cellared and will improve with age.



### Rich Red

Steal: Halter Ranch “Synthesis” Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles, CA \$21  
From a small winery near Tablas Creek and Justin, this wine over-delivers with rich fruit and supple, drinkable tannins.  
Splurge: Ridge Estate “Monte Bello Vineyard” Cabernet Sauvignon, Santa Cruz Mountains, CA \$57  
An absolute California classic that can be enjoyed now or aged. An impressive gift for even the most discerning wine collector.

Letter, continued from page 1

to provide giving for the future.  
We continue to remain active with the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama by volunteering each month and partnering with them to produce a dinner soirée at their warehouse facility on March 5, 2022. They in turn, will gladly donate a scholarship or grant in the name of the Community Food Bank for one of our applicants. Our chapter will be able to continue to raise the bar in giving to women in food, beverage, and hospitality.  
We plan to continue our Sweet Treats Valentine Boxes at Pepper Place Market. The event was eagerly embraced by our Dames last year and was successful in raising \$1,700 for our scholarship and grant giving.  
We look forward to creating

another initiative in 2022 assisting Wellhouse with education in nutrition, food preparation, and food choices for their residents. Wellhouse is a safe haven for women and girls who have been victims of sex trafficking. Our Dames who are dietitians have agreed to start this campaign this coming winter.  
Our Program Committee is in full swing and has events planned well into next year. Whether social or educational, these programs give us the opportunity to stay connected and involved. There is definitely something for everyone.  
I look forward to another wonderful year of working together in raising awareness of our mission of philanthropy, education, and outreach helping women of all ages in our industry.  
with love and gratitude,  
Kathy G

## Events Calendar

Sunday, December 5	5:30 p.m. Dame Rebel Negley’s home	Holiday Party Bring an appetizer + recipe
Thursday, December 9	5:30 p.m. The Cook’s Store of Mountain Brook 2841 Cahaba Road hosted by Dame Wesley Lassen, owner	Dames Holiday Shopping Event
Wednesday, January 12	5-7 p.m. Location TBD	Better Kombucha with Dame Nancey Legg
Thursday, January 27	Lunch Location TBD	Financial Workshop for Women with Julie Helmers of Lathrop Helmers, Merrill Lynch Wealth Management and Elizabeth Brasher of Warren Averett



# Magical Meals at Disney World

by Donna Cornelius

At Disney World a few years ago, we had just chalked up our third It's a Small World ride with our little granddaughter, and we were looking forward to a fourth about as much as a root canal. But then we talked her into hopping over to Epcot, where we discovered that the Epcot Food and Wine Festival was going on.

This annual food-centric event, which usually lasts from about mid-July to mid-November, can give adults a magical experience of their own. Booths are set up all around Epcot from a host of countries, each offering their own specialties in small-plate form plus beverages—wine, beer and creative mixed drinks. A glass of sparkling pomegranate kir from France's booth was all it took to put the big people in our group in a very festive mood.

Since that first experience, we've tried to time other Disney vacations to coincide with the festival. It's fun to sample treats like green lip mussels from New Zealand, crispy pork belly from Brazil, escargot croissants from France, and a charcuterie cone from Spain. Some booths focus on a particular food or cooking method, such as Flavors from Fire (smoked chocolate cake), Lobster Landing (baked lobster dip with Old Bay chips), and Mac & Eats (truffle mac and cheese with herbed panko). You buy each item individually, so it's a great way to try something new.

The festival debuted in 1996. The first culinary star to participate was a fellow Dame with whom we're all familiar: Julia Child.



*There's no shortage of biscuits, mac and cheese, and other amped-up Southern comfort food at Art Smith's Homecomin'.*

### At the parks:

If you love food, Disney World truly can be the Happiest Place on Earth—not just during the Epcot festival but all year round. A few of our favorite park restaurants are:

- Sanaa at Animal Kingdom Lodge: Watch animals like giraffes and zebras meandering outside while you eat African- and Indian-inspired dishes. Start with the naan service, which includes a variety of tasty sauces.
- Le Cellier Steakhouse at Epcot's Canada pavilion: Canada always has some of the best food at the festival, but this restaurant is open year-round. The steaks are sublime—and so are the poutine and the cheddar cheese soup.
- Columbia Harbor House in the Magic Kingdom: For a quick-service lunch, the lobster roll is a nice treat for the big folks. Little ones

can still get chicken fingers and such.

- Via Napoli Ristorante e Pizzeria at Epcot: Traditional Neapolitan pizzas are the star of the show here. They're made with San Marzano tomatoes, fresh mozzarella and Caputo flour, imported from southern Italy. I read that restaurateur Nick Valenti visited famous pizza places in Naples to learn the art of dough, crust, sauce and oven temperature before creating the menu.

### At Disney Springs:

If you can tear your group away from the parks, dinner at Disney Springs is a must. Several celebrity chefs have set up shop here, including:

- Jose Andres, Jaleo: I admire Andres for his charitable efforts—and also for his food. We ordered a variety of Spanish treats and shared them: Serrano ham, patatas bravas,

apple and fennel salad with manchego cheese, walnuts and sherry dressing (so good I tried to duplicate it at home). And speaking of cheese, my grandchildren ate about \$50 worth of manchego before we cut them off.

- Art Smith, Homecomin': Andres may get the title of Most Philanthropic Chef, but Art Smith wins my award for Famous Chef I'd Most Like to Have a Beer With, just because he seems like a hoot. But his food is no joke: Church Lady Deviled Eggs, fried chicken and donuts, and luscious hummingbird cake. Just remember that calories don't count when you're on vacation.

- Masaharu Morimoto, Morimoto Asia: I don't know which is more beautiful here—the food or the restaurant itself. The stunning two-story interior has huge chandeliers, Shanghai-inspired lounges and an exhibition kitchen. Try the duck, the shumai (dumplings filled with pork, shrimp, mushrooms and Tobiko caviar) and just about anything on the famous Iron Chef's inventive Asian menu.

Other James Beard Award-winning chefs with eateries at Disney Springs are Wolfgang Puck (Wolfgang Puck Bar and Grill), Rick Bayless (Frontera Cocina) and Tony Mantuano (Terralina Crafted Italian).

Food Network favorite Guy Fieri has Chicken Guy! (The exclamation point is theirs, not mine, just FYI.) One of the 20 sauces you can get to go with your chicken fingers is his famous Donkey Sauce. The kids will love this place—and they'll also enjoy Sprinkles, the place founded



*Two of our favorites—it's hard to choose—at the Epcot Food and Wine Festival were the baked lobster dip with Old Bay Chips at Lobster Landing (above) and the charcuterie cone from Spain's booth (at right).*



by Candace Nelson that jump-started the cupcake craze.

But the must-visit place at Disney Springs is easily Gideon's Bakehouse. Be prepared to wait before you're allowed inside the bakery, which looks like a creepy old bookstore. But trust me—it's an experience worth waiting for, especially

when you add in the humongous half-pound cookies and cake slices in tempting flavors.

A final tip: Who among us hasn't had an iconic Dole Whip at Disney? But did you know that you can get a boozy version with rum? I am not making this up.



# Let's Toast

**Raquel Ervin**, CEO and Executive Chef, Panoptic LLC, was named to the *Birmingham Business Journal's* 2021



Top 40 Under 40. She started her own catering company in 2014, launched a food truck in 2020, and opened a brick-and-mortar location in 2021. Raquel has competed on Food Network and Cooking Channel shows

**Deborah Stone** made Oprah's 2121 Favorite Things list with her Stone Hollow Farmstead Heirloom Popcorn Gift Box.



**Kristen Farmer Hall**, founder and co-owner of Bandit Pâtisserie, was featured in the October 2021 *Bon Appetit* restaurant issue. Her Chocolate-Almond Pear Tart was highlighted as was her fraise technique.

The December 2021/January 2022 issue of *Garden & Gun* shared Kristen's delicious Banana Pudding Semifreddo and tips for making it in advance.

**Mary-Frances Heck** was recognized by the M. F. K. Fisher Prize committee for her article, "Clay: Bringing the Ancient Cooking Medium Home to the Modern Kitchen," published in *Food & Wine*.



**Rebecca Gann** has been tapped by Epicurean Hotels in both Tampa and Atlanta as Southern Culinary & Creative's Creative Director. Rebecca is working on curating and planning inspiring weekly educational experiences, or Masterclasses, to take place in their state-of-the-art epicurean theatres located in the heart of the food- and wine-centric hotels. Closer to home, Rebecca will be helping produce monthly pop-up dinners featuring Chef Ryan Westover at Pizza Grace when it opens later this year.



**Nancey Legg**, owner of Better Kombucha, reports that Better Kombucha Apple and Blueberry are finalists in the 2022 Good Food Awards.



**Fanoula Gulas**

has received a permit to sell her specialty items to stores and reach a larger audience than just through her catering and farmers' market booths. Since Joy Smith has opened Sorelle in Homewood, Fanoula has been able to use Joy's commercial kitchen, allowing both to benefit from shared experience, enthusiasm, and wisdom.



**Crystal Peterson**, owner of Yo' Mama's Restaurant, celebrated the 7th anniversary of being in business. Obviously the customers like the fresh meals and her commitment to Birmingham.



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Birmingham Chapter  
P.O. Box 43542  
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

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Newsletter committee members:  
Martha Johnston (co-chair),  
Rachel West (co-chair), Jessica  
Bennett, Donna Cornelius, Leigh  
Sloss-Corra, Margaret Ann Snow,  
Susan Swagler, and Jan Walsh.