



Les Dames d'Escoffier  
INTERNATIONAL



Founded in 2013

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

Spring 2022

## President's Note

Dear Dames,

As I look back at last year's Spring letter, it's hard to believe that we're in our second year of the pandemic and we are STILL making great strides. Many of you have seen our financial report, which propels us into more giving than ever before.

We will donate \$33,000 in scholarship and grants this year, including a scholarship to a Hispanic recipient through Fiesta, Inc. In addition, we have an endowment that will perpetuate an additional scholarship for next year. We're making great strides furthering education and philanthropy for women in the industries of food, beverage, and hospitality in our state.

We have a new partnership this spring with the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama that will enable us to offer another grant in the name of the Food Bank. In return, we are collaborating in producing a "Gala" Dinner... an unprecedented event in their warehouse with chandeliers! The event is called "Feast for Hope." Our catering companies are being paid to produce the event, and our sommelier and wine experts will assist in selecting the wines. It will be a multicourse tasting

*continued on page 17, see Letter*

## Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

*Our chapter is partnering with the Food Bank in meaningful ways*



*A group of hardworking Dames teamed up on January 19 for our monthly volunteer day at the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama, including Mary Esther Carpenter and Kate Nicholson. To learn more about our growing partnership with the Food Bank, see page 2.*



# A Growing Partnership with the Food Bank

by Susan Swagler

Our chapter’s participation and partnership with The Community Food Bank of Central Alabama on their first fundraising gala—Feast for Hope—is taking shape, and it’s exciting. The event is March 5 and will be held in the Food Bank’s warehouse, which will be dressed up with chandeliers and beautifully set tables.

Chapter President Kathy G. Mezrano says: “This is a unique opportunity as well as a partnership with the Community Food Bank, Feeding Alabama. It’s a win-win for both organizations. There will be a tasting menu of several courses provided by our Dame-owned catering companies with wine pairings for each course. Our chapter’s sommelier and wine experts will speak to the choice of wine, as each course is served. Videos and presentations of Les Dames BHM will be woven into the program throughout the evening.

“They’ve sold 20 corporate tables and two VIP tables at \$25,000 and haven’t even opened public ticket sales yet. This will give us even more visibility in the corporate world.”

Also, Kathy points out, we’re partnering with an organization whose mission aligns with our own.

In addition to a plated-seated dinner, the 300 or so expected guests will be greeted with Champagne and invited to tour the warehouse and even assemble a few boxes if they’d like to do that. There will be an informative video played throughout the evening highlighting the work of the Food Bank and of our own organization. The Food Bank will give LDEI Birmingham a scholarship to award to a young woman who is making a difference in her own com-



*The upcoming Feast for Hope gala on March 5 will highlight the important work of the Food Bank as well as LDEI.*



munity regarding food equality.

“In the communities we serve, the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama will be an agent of positive change to end hunger by engaging with dynamic partners, passionate staff and volunteers, and educational initiatives driven by sufficient resources, facilities, and programs,” said Ginger Pegues, assistant director of development for the Food Bank.

Dames Kay Bruno Reed of Iz Weddings & Events; Erin Mooney and Sara Walker of Tre Luna Catering Co.; Kathy G. Mezrano of Kathy G & Co., and Idie Hastings of

OvenBird restaurant have come up with a fantastic multi-course menu of tasting portions that will be paired with wines curated by Dames Alexis Douglas and Eileen Hallmark.

This event—the food, the wine, the rentals, the décor, etc.—is paid for by the Food Bank. Kathy G. will call upon Dames to help set tables the day before the event and work as hostesses that evening. Several already have said they will be there—wearing something blue (either outfit or accessory) to identify themselves as Dames.

Look for more details to come!

# 2022 Scholarships and Grants Increase

by Jessica Bennett

The Birmingham LDEI Board met on January 25 to discuss an annual budget of giving for grants and scholarships, agreeing on a total of \$33,000.

Most of the money, \$30,000, came from regular scholarship funds, with Dame Becky Satterfield offering \$1,000 for her named scholarship and \$2,000 from The Community Food Bank of Central Alabama for their named scholarship. From the \$33,000, there will be two entrepreneur grants of \$5,000 each and the remaining \$23,000 will go to scholarships.

The Board also suggested partnering with Fiesta on a new scholar-

ship. Fiesta is a Birmingham-based non-profit that organizes an annual festival that celebrates Hispanic culture and community in Alabama with the goal of providing Hispanic students with scholarships. Fiesta has awarded more than \$80,000 in scholarships in the last 18 years. The proposed scholarship would be administered by Fiesta, but would be offered in the name of LDEI Birmingham, and awarded to a female student. Dame Cristina Almanza, a member of The Fiesta Board, will facilitate the partnership between our two programs.

Future scholarships will be bolstered with funds from our new Birmingham LDEI endowment, which the Board voted to fund at

\$155,964.11. Of those funds \$25,000 came from our operating budget and \$30,500 came from our scholarship account this year. The establishment of the endowment represents a significant milestone for our chapter, ensuring the future of our giving and broadcasting our financial stewardship to partners and sponsors.

With the money approved for this year’s grants and scholarships, LDEI Birmingham will exceed \$100,000 in total giving since we began giving grants in 2015.

Applications for these scholarships and entrepreneurial grants can be found under the Grants and Scholarships tab on the LDEI Birmingham website. The deadline for applications is March 7, 2022.

# Birmingham Dame Rolls the Dice on National Television

by Susan Swagler

Our own Birmingham Dame Raquel Ervin, executive chef and owner of SLIDE, the Panoptic food truck, and Panoptic Catering, made her third appearance on national television as a competitor on the Food Network’s *Chopped* on January 18, 2022.

The show pits four chefs against each other as they compete by turning baskets of mystery ingredients into a tasty three-course meal. The final chef wins \$10,000.

As the name suggests, people get chopped on this show, and Raquel did—but not before representing the Magic City with determination and competitiveness and a certain grace. Before leaving the competition—which was a casino-themed show—Raquel rolled the dice, took some chances, and opted for creativity over playing it safe.



Previously, Raquel has been a finalist on primetime cooking shows on both the Food Network and The Cooking Channel. And she’s been pretty busy here at home lately, too.

Raquel’s Irondale restaurant reopened in early January 2022 with a new name—SLIDE—and new menu items including delicious specialty sliders, signature salads, gourmet sides, and more. She’s

planning a second location in Pelham.

Raquel has a lot of fans—at home and around the country—and their support means a lot to her. As she told them in an Instagram post directly after the *Chopped* competition: “Thank you so much for your outpouring of love and support, your likes and your shares, and your comments and your encouraging words. For me, it’s simply an honor to be selected from amongst thousands of applicants who apply to be on Food Network’s most sought-after show—*Chopped*.”

“It was an amazing experience, and it was overall a win for me on so many levels. It’s definitely an honor for me to represent our state and also to represent the city of Birmingham’s wonderful foodie/culinary scene. “Don’t worry,” she added, “I’ll be back, and I will be competing for the win.”



# Sweet Treats Boxes: Gifts That Keep Giving



Thanks to the help of 29 Dames, there were enough wonderful baked goods to assemble 80 boxes of Valentine's treats for pickup at the Market at Pepper Place Curb-side on February 12.

Sales from the Sweet Treats boxes totaled \$2,000, and we also received some cash donations out of the process too—enough to fund a scholarship. Best of all, a large majority of orders were not from Dames, meaning we are reaching more new people who will learn about us and hopefully support us in other ways in the future.



# Meet Our New Members!

Our chapter gained 14 new members in August 2021. Here, get to know the last six of these extraordinary women a little better. The other eight were featured in the Winter 2021 newsletter.

## Clara Darling

**Place of birth:** Auburn, AL  
**College/professional school(s) attended:** Johnson & Wales University, Denver, CO: AS, Baking and Pastry Arts; AS, Culinary Arts; BS, Culinary Nutrition  
**Samford University, Birmingham, AL:** MS, Nutrition Science and Dietetic Internship  
**Current position:** Director of Food Labs and Wellness Kitchen, faculty instructor, Samford University  
**How did you get your start?** I grew up helping my grandmother in the kitchen, but I got my professional start at Gourmet Tiger Bakery in Auburn in 2008.



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

I love the energy, passion, and drive of the industry as a whole. There is always an immediate connection with people who have worked in foodservice, a mutual understanding of the work we do, regardless of how different our food or products may be.  
My current position is a dream job. I get to teach students not just how to cook, but how to use food to better their lives and the lives of others. My professional goal since

being an undergraduate myself, was to help bridge the gap between chefs and dietitians. This job gives me the unique opportunity to do just that.  
**What does success look like to you?** Success to me is having a purpose, a job where I can do my part to make the world a better place. It also means being stable and content, while always pushing yourself to grow as an individual (through continued education, volunteering, traveling, etc.).  
**If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do?** I think I would go to Switzerland in the winter to snowboard and take chocolatier classes. I've wanted to do that for a long time.

## Sara Walker

**Place of birth:** Huntsville, AL  
**College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned:** Attended Auburn after high school. Transferred to UAB. Bachelor of Science: Major Psychology, Minor Anthropology  
**Current position:** General manager of Tre Luna Catering (behind the scenes at Tre Luna Bar and Kitchen) and freelance photographer  
**How did you get your start?** I worked in the food industry at a young age starting when my parents opened a restaurant in Huntsville when I was in high school.



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

Off-premise catering and events. I love the fast-paced, high-energy, organized chaos when everything comes together creating the most memorable experience. Food brings people together.  
**What does success look like to you?** Success is ever changing. It's having the courage to face fears and challenges and then use those

experiences to help others overcome their challenges, too. Success is creating a culture where you can motivate and inspire others.  
**If you could plan your last meal, what would it be?** Pasta with chanterelle mushrooms, white wine, and butter sauce. Dessert: anything with chocolate and peanut butter.  
**If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do?** Backpacking through Iceland  
**Bonus:** I'm tattooed from the waist down.



Erin Mooney

**Place of birth:** Selma, AL  
**College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned:** University of Alabama at Birmingham, Early Childhood Education  
**Current position:** Owner of Tre Luna Catering, co-owner of Tre Luna Bar & Kitchen, co-owner of Moon-Walker, Inc.  
**How did you get your start?** I grew up in the restaurant business, my family owned a restaurant. My husband and I started our catering company in 2014.  
**What do you enjoy about your**



**current position and the industry in general?** I most enjoy working with my amazing team and serv-

ing others.  
**What does success look like to you?** Success for me means providing opportunities for my employees to help them live fulfilling lives and achieve their goals.  
**If you could plan your last meal, what would it be?** Raw oysters and Champagne

**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 Italy. My family is Italian, and I have always wanted to go. I would eat all the food, drink the wine, and see all the beautiful scenery.  
**Bonus:** I am a dance instructor in my free time. I am married to my best friend and have three beautiful children.

Laura Rinsky

**Place of birth:** Queens, NY  
**College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned:** Culinary Institute of America, A.A.S., culinary arts; Rutgers University, B.A., communications/business; Colorado State University, M.Ed., adult education and training  
**Current position:** I recently left my chef-instructor position at Lawson State to develop private pastry classes and work on another book.



**How did you get your start?** Making bagels at age 15—no New Yorker can survive without a good bagel.  
**What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general?** I love the energy of the industry and the spirited people in it.  
**What does success look like to you?** Living a valuable life with no regrets.

**If you could plan your last meal, what would it be?** Croissants from La Maison d’Isabelle, Ray’s pizza, a vanilla egg cream and killer chocolate cake garnished with a black and white cookie.  
**If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do?** I would be a food first responder with World Central Kitchen.  
**Bonus:** The light of my life is my son, Elliott, and I have a crazy hairless dog named Thor, a.k.a. Thornado.

Fanoula Gulas

**Place of birth:** Norfolk, VA  
**College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned:** Graduated from Old Dominion University with a English literature degree.  
**How did you get your start?** I began baking because it was a pleasure to make food that made people happy. Baking was a way to show I cared and came from the heart. I worked at farmers’ markets and got more business by working with caterers.  
**What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general?**



I truly enjoy baking items that are unique to my culture. I love to see the reaction of those who have not had Greek desserts or foods. For those who have had them before, sometimes they bring back memories and great stories. The best part about it all is the fantastic conversation and connection that comes out of sharing a delicious treat.  
**What does success look like to you?** Success is being able to appreciate your hard work and know others appreciate it as well.

**If you could plan your last meal, what would it be?** My last meal would be several mezethes from my Greek background like lamb chops, manestra, melitzanasalata, taramasalata, salad, greens, and fresh bread  
**If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do?** With a week free of obligation, I would be traveling with my family to Yellowstone Park or the Grand Canyon to enjoy the gorgeous open spaces and nature.  
**Bonus:** I live with my husband, Ike, and have a son and daughter both attending college.

Audrey Pannell

**Place of birth:** Birmingham, AL  
**College/professional school/s attended, major/degree earned:** Auburn University; Bachelor of arts in public relations and minor in business  
**Current position:** Vice president of public relations at Style Advertising  
**How did you get your start?** I graduated college in 2009 and started out interning at a public relations firm. I asked to do anything and everything to gain experience and show them I was worth hiring on fulltime even during a recession. Showing initiative, working my butt off and coming up with new digital strategies for clients did the trick.



**What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general?** There’s nothing better than writing about food and drink content and promoting the people behind it. Seeing how hard our local restaurants work to survive in this business is truly inspiring, and I’m honored to help in any way I can.  
**What does success look like to you?** Success is being happy at any place in your life – it’s not about where you are in your career or your family, it’s about whether you’re happy in your life.

**If you could plan your last meal, what would it be?** Medium rare filet mignon with lump crab meat, smashed garlic potatoes, asparagus, (Sister Schubert) roll, and a molten chocolate cake. An Aperol spritz or a dirty martini wouldn’t hurt either.  
**Bonus:** I have a rescue Corgi named Cali, who I adopted from the Greater Birmingham Humane Society. She was the best \$25 bucks I’ve ever spent.



# LDEI Membership Nomination Update

by Leigh Sloss-Corra

Now that the holiday season is over, it's time to start looking around the community for women who might be good candidates for membership in LDEI. Think about the strong women out there who could benefit our organization. All of us will have met someone in the past year who piqued our interest socially or professionally. Now is the time to invite these women for coffee or a drink, get to know them, share the philanthropic mission of LDEI, and gauge their interest in joining.

Our membership is already quite diverse in representing different areas of culinary expertise, but we will serve our community better with increased diversity of race, culture, background, and experience.

In addition to adding members from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, New Membership Chair Erin Isbell shared, "We need more members willing to stand up and represent the group on a community stage. We could also really use more women with TV or marketing experience. We need someone fun to make Instagram reels for us. This past year, we added several new members who could help with the planning and execution of our big

fundraiser. What we need now are members who are plugged in to social marketing and aren't too busy trying to manage their own social media to help us."

This year the nomination period will be May 10 – June 15, with applications reviewed in July and new members voted on at the annual meeting in mid-August. Erin will be sending specifics about the process for nominating new members soon.

As a reminder, if you are a Dame nominating a prospective new member, you'll need to:

- Make sure the candidate has a good knowledge of the organization and membership requirements
- Make sure the candidate completes and submits all necessary forms and letters of recommendation before the nomination period deadline
- Write a recommendation for the candidate
- Enlist another Dame to second your nomination and write a second nomination
- Be willing to mentor the candidate if selected for membership
- Candidates can self-nominate.

With a roster of 86 current LDEI Birmingham Chapter members, some may still see the call for new member nominations as unnecessary. What can more women accom-

plish? The answer is plenty. While our numbers are impressive on paper, we are professionals with limited time to volunteer. Because of stresses related to Covid-19, many of us have had to cut back the time and funds we can give to LDEI. Others have withdrawn due to career change, age, illness or burn-out.

Meanwhile we have big goals. We're establishing an endowment to help stabilize and increase funds for our scholarships and entrepreneur grants. We're partnering with other organizations that help women in need, namely the Food Bank and The WellHouse, to strengthen our impact locally. And we're developing these programs and others as models that sister chapters will hopefully choose to launch in their own communities. The more representative and engaged members we have in our chapter, the more we can support each other and make a more lasting impact.

So check your calendars and book those coffee dates. If you have questions or want someone to join you for a meet-up, drop Erin a note or invite one of the Membership Committee members. The relevance and future good health of our organization and our community is up to us.

# LDEI 2021 Holiday Party Pics

*We enjoyed a fantastic turnout for our holiday party this year at Dame Rebel Negley's beautiful home decorated with greenery and lights. Dames brought all kinds of dishes—savory and sweet. There was plenty of wine and lots and lots of good cheer. An extra special treat (bottom image): Some Dames shared their beautiful voices with us.*





# Remembering Dame Ashley Tarver

by Susan Swagler

Members of the Birmingham chapter were shocked and saddened by the sudden death of Ashley Tarver on January 19, 2022. Many of us knew Ashley from when she was a member of our chapter and through business connections and from The Market at Pepper Place.

Gia McCollister was especially close to Ashley. When asked to share a few thoughts, Gia said, “It’s so hard for me to write in English about something painful to me. She used to tell me that I was her ‘Latin Mamá.’ Some days I just sit and remember...”

Alexis Douglas shared a simple truth about Ashley when she emailed fellow Dames following the sad news: “She was so young and fun and talented.”

Indeed, Ashley was all those things. Ashley returned to Birmingham a few years ago and started a new company called Domestica, which offered meal prep, kitchen reorganization, and even grocery shopping. She told Dame Donna Cornelius in a story for *Over the Mountain Journal*, “I’m a private chef without the expense.”

Before that, Donna wrote, Ashley “sharpened her culinary skills in exotic places (including Argentina and Spain), worked at a restaurant on a private island and at nationally recognized Highlands Bar & Grill and owned her own olive oil company (Copper Pot Kitchen).”

Ashley found success along the way but experienced some setbacks, too. However, her habit was to look forward and follow her heart. As she told Donna: “I learned about empathy and kindness as well as failure. You can be bitter and angry, or you



can choose to laugh and find joy. ... Most people who cook don’t do it for money or fame—they do it to show love, to take care of other people.”

Here are some of the memories and tributes members shared about Ashley:

“It is a heartbreak and terrible loss for her family, I’m sure. Ashley was a vibrant and popular vendor at the Market at Pepper Place for many years, selling infused olive oils under the name Copper Pot Kitchen. She had big dreams of culinary success and loved inspiring others to do the same. Ashley was hard-working, an enthusiastic member of LDEI who valued her relationships with her sister Dames and never hesitated to reach out to members locally and around the world when she was travelling or in need. In the same way, she was always ready to help others when she could. Ashley was a true character, with a wicked sense of humor and a deep devotion to her dog, Bleu. She will be missed.”

—Leigh Sloss-Corra

“My heart just sank with sadness. We are so close in age. She also told me to join Les Dames together with Angela and Leigh. I hate to hear this. Praying for her and her family during this difficult time.”

—Cristina Almanza

“I’m so sad to hear of Ashley’s passing. She was my introduction to LDEI and suggested I apply for the New Entrepreneur Award in 2018. I have fond memories of her.”

—Nancey Legg

“Ashley was beautiful, adventurous, witty, and very intelligent.”

—Becky Satterfield

“I had the privilege of getting to know Ashley on a deeper level when we traveled on the original ‘Flavors of Mexico’ trip put on by the Mexico chapter of Les Dames. We visited Guadalajara and Tequila and enjoyed a private tequila tasting in the cellar of Mundo Cuervo. On the final night of the trip, we had a spectacular event at the Casa of

Mundo Cuervo. After the event, Ashley and Nancie (a Dame from North Carolina) and I decided we needed ‘just one more’ and we went to a local cantina near our hotel. At the cantina, Ashley realized her purse was missing. Together, we retraced her steps; thankfully Ashley was fluent in Spanish. Finally, we realized the purse was in her ‘goody bag’ that we all received at the end of the fiesta. We had a good laugh and decided to go back to the same cantina for a final round of the evening. At the cantina, a Dame from the Mexico chapter was eating a local soup-type dish; she was insistent that we try a bite. Glad we did! It was the most flavorful dish and so different from anything I had previously tried! I struggled with the pronunciation, and final Ashley said, ‘Betsy, it means meat in juice.’ Once I got back to the U.S., a quick google search of ‘meat in juice’ yielded the recipe. Carne en su Jugo is now a regular staple at my house and is my go-to for a hearty stew/soup. The last time Ashley and I spoke, I thanked her for ‘losing’ her wallet in Tequila; we both had a hearty laugh about it. See, without that incident I would have never gotten to experience an incredible local dish. Ashley was full of life, and I will miss her dearly!!”

—Betsy McAtee

“I met Ashley at Pepper Place when we were both selling items in our booths. I introduced myself to her and immediately saw a charismatic, savvy businesswoman. She was so open with her information about business and mentioned Les Dames, explaining they support women’s businesses and gave scholarships to women. ... She really believed in the organization. We would run into each other at farmers’ markets, and



she was always ready with a smile. She will be remembered as a kind, warm, energetic woman with a passion for life. May her memory be eternal.”

—Fanoula Gulas

“I remember when Ashley came to a Ladies Philoptochos Meeting at our church and brought her olive oils. Everyone enjoyed sampling the different oils and talking to Ashley about the products. Every time I looked across the room, Ashley was surrounded by people talking and laughing. She sold everything she brought. :) It was a fun night and a wonderful memory.”

—Sonthe Burge

“I have been so rocked by this news still! I’m not even sure why, just shocked. Someone gave me a poster in college that said: ‘Some people come into our lives and quickly go. Some stay awhile and leave footprints on our hearts, and we are changed forever.’ This has

been whirling in my head since receiving the news. We didn’t have this great friendship, but she left footprints!”

—Rebecca Williamson

“Ashley had such a generous spirit, and she shared it with friends and strangers, if she saw they needed her help. I feel so lucky to have gotten to know her through LDEI, and to call her my friend. Last year, when I lost my dad to cancer, Ashley texted me often, checking on me, and we talked about how much we loved our dads, what we learned from them, and how much she was struggling with her dad’s decline in health. She would send me funny things to make me laugh, memes or stories she wrote (she was such an *amazing* storyteller), which were so helpful and uplifting, particularly during those early, dark days of grief. It was a kindness and a deep act of friendship that I will never forget. I am devastated that her story is over.”

—Rachel West



# Susan Notter: Living the Sweet Life

by Donna Cornelius

Susan Notter’s journey from one Birmingham to another has been a sweet adventure.

Susan, one of our newest Dames, grew up in Birmingham, England, and enjoyed making cakes and cupcakes for her sisters’ parties. Since graduating from culinary school in England, she’s coached and won high-level pastry competitions and created chocolates in Luzerne and Zurich, Switzerland. She taught and directed departments at the International School of Confectionary Arts; Culinard; and YT Career Institute, a prominent trade school in Pennsylvania.

These days, Susan’s professional life focuses on chocolate. She works for Max Felchlin AG as the Switzerland-based chocolate company’s dedicated United States Chef and Sales Professional.

She’s also appeared on several Food Network Shows, where she demonstrated her skills at making blown sugar creations and extraordinarily designed cakes.

Susan has already shared her know-how with us by leading a chocolate class a few months ago. Here’s a little more about one of our very talented Dames:

**What made you definitely decide on a career as a pastry chef?**

I really enjoyed being in the kitchen, both baking and cooking. What I made turned out well and usually looked pretty good also! I found out about culinary schools and, after working for one year in a hotel, I completed a two-year hospitality program. I always knew



*This apricot and almond dessert was featured in the magazine So Good.*

my heart was in pastry, so I worked all my spare time in a small bakery. After that, I went to Germany to work full-time pastry.

**What brought you to the U.S., and in what year?**

The first time was 1986 to teach sugar classes near Washington, D.C. We came every year after that and then decided to move the sugar school from Switzerland to the USA in 1992. We saw lots of opportunity here to teach.

**How did you end up in Birmingham, Alabama?**

I moved here in 2001 the first time to open up the baking and pastry division of Culinard, the culinary program at Virginia College. It was a wonderful project to build from the ground up.

I moved back up north a few years later but always missed the

South and the warmth of the people here. I moved back in 2020 as my job now affords me the luxury of living anywhere as long as I can get to an airport. It is also a lot less expensive to live here than in Pennsylvania, and the weather is much better.

**What do you enjoy most about teaching and coaching others?**

I love the industry and enjoy being able to pass on my knowledge. Coaching helps me learn also, and I get to work with some very talented chefs. I can still be part of the competition without having to do so much of the work that is involved. It’s very rewarding to meet graduates of the programs I ran and still see them in the industry and being successful. I feel that I opened their eyes to pastry as a career path and not just a job.

**What are the plusses and minuses of appearing in TV competitions, such as “Halloween Wars” on Food Network?**

Great exposure—but a lot of drama. I feel the focus is not always the skill and professionalism in our industry but the breakdowns and tears. It would be good to see more skill-based shows, but maybe no one would watch. It is also short-lived; tomorrow it will be someone else on the screen. I much prefer being involved with professional industry-based events with my peers.

**How did you become associated with Felchlin? What does that job involve?**

I heard about the position by chance and then read the job description, which I thought fit me perfectly. I lived in Switzerland for 10 years and speak German, I understand the culture in the U.S. and in Switzerland, and Felchlin makes some of the best chocolate in the world. I travel to customers to train their teams, to make product suggestions, and do demonstrations for groups. I help the distributors sales team and travel with them to meet customers. I also work on product innovation and recipes along with the other chefs employed by Felchlin. I am responsible for the technical support in the U.S. and Canada.

**Besides chocolate creations, what other dishes—sweet and savory—do you enjoy making?**

I do cook; simple healthy food is my preference. I love pulled and blown sugar, but I do not do quite as much of that at this time. I make cookies and pies for my family and share the extra treats from my demos with them also. My kids think I just make “fancy professional stuff”!



*Above: This Key lime and chocolate dessert features dark chocolate bonbons with raspberry jelly. At right: Susan shows off her gold medal and trophy from the 2020 Culinary Olympics.*



**What’s something about chocolate that most people may not know?**

The bean contains 55% cocoa butter and 45% nonfat solids. The cocoa butter gives it that wonderful smooth melt, but it also makes couverture difficult to work with as it has six different setting (crystallization) points. That’s why tempering is not easy and takes practice and knowledge of the cocoa butter and what it is doing in the couverture.

**Tell us about your family. We understand your son is also an award-winning pastry chef.**

I have a daughter, two sons, and two young grandchildren. My middle son, Nicoll, is also a pastry chef and is currently helping out in the Netflix show “Bake Squad.” He has spent time working in Switzerland and has just come back to the U.S. I am very proud of him;

*continued on page 17, see Notter*



# From the Farm: Making Plans for Spring



*The high tunnels at Snow's Bend Farm provide a sense of spring on frigid winter days. Unlike greenhouses, in high tunnels young plants are transplanted into the soil to grow and are simply covered and protected.*

**By Margaret Ann Snow**

Come the beginning of January, a tower of seed catalogs has built up on my desk, and they continue to stuff my mailbox each day. Promising “high yields” and “excellent flavor,” their glossy pictures represent a new year, a new start, a chance to do it all over again but better. By mid-January the seeds have been ordered. They lay dormant in their packages scattered around my office, waiting for spring.

So much of farming is looking ahead. Knowing this, it still feels absurd to seed heat-loving tomatoes on a cold January day. Bundled up from head to toe in multiple layers. I pick the largest ones from a handful of seeds. One by one they go into the cell filled with soil mix and

hope. These flats are pampered with climate control and lighting until they are transplanted into our high tunnels in mid-March. We will have to wait until the end of May for fruit.

Currently, those high tunnels are full of chard, kale, arugula, collards, lettuce, spinach, frisee, escarole, dill, cilantro, and sorrel. On frigid winter days, when the wind is so cold and harsh it hurts, I will step into the tunnels and it is like walking into spring. It is a lush vegetable jungle. A high tunnel is not the same as a greenhouse. A greenhouse is for plants growing in pots or seed flats, but in a high tunnel, the plants are grown directly in the soil, simply covered and protected from the elements.

Outside of the tunnels, winter is

in full effect. We have row cover, similar to a blanket but specifically made for agricultural purposes, on many beds to protect the crops from low temperatures. What receives the cover and when is tricky. The first frost or freeze is hardest on the plants, but after that they become hardier. That said, we have had many nights in the low 20s when we covered almost everything. Some crops we abandon at a certain point and others we wait to cover until it becomes necessary. For example, the over-wintered strawberries will not receive row cover until mid-March, when we want to protect every flower in the hope that they each become a ripe berry in mid-April (it takes about four weeks to get from flower to berry).



*Above: Row cover, similar to a blanket but specifically made for agricultural purposes, is placed on many beds to protect the crops from low temperatures.*

*Left: Cabbage generally handles the winter weather just fine.*

turn into hundreds of flats of fresh spring varieties of lettuces; and new plantings of chard, kale, cabbage, frisee, escarole, Treviso; and before long we are seeding cucumbers, squash, basil, and melons.

I cannot predict what new challenges the year will bring, both in the garden and beyond, but there is something about starting over that always allows me to remember the failures of the past year more fondly. There were many for us last year; raccoons eating all of the watermelons, not digging potatoes and pulling up garlic before heavy rains set in. I could go on for a while listing the things that did not go as planned. In the early months of a new year, it is easier to see them clearly for what they are—a chance to learn and do just a little bit better this go ‘round.

The hardiest winter crops are grouped together and called “cole crops,” varieties of the species *Brassica oleracea*. Cabbage, kale, collards, and kohlrabi handle the winter weather just fine for the most part.

Last year I found this recipe for Collard Greens Ramen from *Food & Wine*. Now it is a winter staple. Two of my favorite cabbage recipes are the Bright Cabbage Slaw from *Salt Fat Acid Heat* by Samin Nosrat and Carmelized Cabbage Risotto from *The Smitten Kitchen*

by Deb Perelman. Kohlrabi may be a bit weird for some, but it is just misunderstood in my mind. The flavor is sweet and crunchy and it is incredibly versatile. We held a recipe contest with our CSA members and I have the entries posted here: <http://www.snowsbendfarm.com/kohlrabi-recipe-contest.html> I would love to hear if any of my fellow Dames try a recipe and what you think!

The five flats of tomatoes that mark the first plantings of the year quickly



# “Spring is White Around the Corner!”

By Alexis Douglas,  
certified sommelier

Are you dreaming of greener grass and lush trees? Colorful flowers and warmer temperatures? Dishes made with spring vegetables? I am looking forward to all of these delightful spring things and to prepare, I’ve sought out exciting and interesting white wines that will complement the weather and fresh flavors that spring brings:

**Hans Wirsching “Iphofer” Silvaner, Franken, Germany 2020 \$25.99, Vintage Wine Shoppe**  
This hard-to-find but easy-to-spot dry (meaning not sweet...indicated by the word “Troocken” on the label) white is fresh, with tropical fruit, minerality and a hint of white pepper. The distinctive “Bocksbeutel” flat squatty bottle is unique to this region of Germany and was designed to be carried as a hip flask. This winery has been making wine since 1630!

**Andrea Felici Verdicchio, Marche, Italy 2019 \$19.99**  
I recently tried this wine by-the-glass at the fabulous La Fresca downtown with simply grilled fish, then spotted it at the River Run Pig! It is vibrant and complex, with notes of pear, almond, oyster shell and citrus zest. Made from organically grown grapes (bonus!).

**Marcel Hugg Pinot Blanc, Alsace, France 2020 \$14.99**  
This zesty crowd-pleaser is medium-bodied, balanced, and dry, with Granny Smith apple, citrus, peach and a super long luscious finish. Incredible value and super versatile: delicious alone, with charcuterie, venison sausage or crab cakes!



**La Fortezza “Sannio” Greco, Campania, Italy \$23.99**  
Soft yet bright, dry yet rich, gold in color, with pretty lemon, ripe apple and honey flavors. From southern Italy, it is versatile with many dishes such as cheeses, pasta with vegetables, and seafood.

**Ptujeska Klet “Pullus” Pinot Grigio, Stajerska, Slovenia 2020 \$15.99**  
While most white wines are made without “skin contact” (the skins of the grapes are removed during winemaking), this wine is made with the skins (it’s an “orange wine”...if it was made from red grapes it would be a rosé). Also, Pinot Grigio is actually a pink grape, which gives this version a gorgeous salmon color. Made at one of the oldest wineries in Europe (1239!).

Offering up a rich texture with flavors of melon, nectarine and pear, this stunner is balanced by bright acidity and refreshing minerality. Super versatile with food or for sipping on its own!

**Lamblin et Fils Bourgogne, Maligny-Les-Chablis, France 2020 \$17.99**  
This outstanding value-priced “baby Chablis” is a classic Chardonnay with a rich texture, ripe fruit, refreshing acidity and complex minerality; a perfect match for oysters.

\*These wines are all available at the Piggly Wiggly River Run unless otherwise indicated. Prices may vary significantly due to Covid-related supply chain issues!

Notter, continued from page 13

as well as being very dedicated and hard-working, he has a very good soul. He recently competed on behalf of Switzerland at the Coupe de Monde in Lyon, France. The others are not in the industry. My daughter works for a nonprofit protecting waterways for fly fishing, and my youngest is about to graduate high school.

**What do you like to do in your spare time (if you have any)?**  
I love the outdoors, so I enjoy hiking, walking, and generally trying to stay fit so I can eat good food!  
I love to dance and took lessons for many years in ballroom, Latin, and swing. Being on the road so much makes it difficult to have hobbies, but my work is so diverse, and all the extra judging, coaching, etc. take up most of my time. I also want to spend as much time as I can with my significant other so he does not feel that I am leaving him out!

**Why did you want to become a member of LDEI?**  
I enjoy being with other women in the industry and interacting with people who understand each other. I want to support and give to LDEI as much as I can. The organization helps other women be successful in the industry, and I would like to be part of that.

Letter, continued from page 1

menu with wine pairings. The evening will be interlaced with videos and presentations by Les Dames. The event will definitely “raise the bar” for us in the corporate world in Birmingham as well as showcasing our chapter to LDEI International. Funds have also been allocated for our new WellHouse project. It will enable Dames to have the necessary background checks and supplies to provide education for the women on nutrition and healthy lifestyles before they re-enter society. We’ve had several Dames extremely interested in participating in this project, which we will start this spring. The funds raised through our September “take-over” at Pepper Place Market will go towards this initiative. Our Valentine’s Sweet Treats Sale at Pepper Place was sold out by early February. It gave our Dames a chance

to work together and create another scholarship opportunity for next year’s budget.  
We do look forward to another annual Southern Soirée, “Champagne & Fried Chicken” event on October 2, 2022. This not only raises funds for grants and scholarships, it gives our Dames an opportunity to all be present working together in an open atmosphere of camaraderie. C&FC has been so successful with the curbside pickup basket that we’ve decided to stay with the format for 2022. Needless to say, we’ve not slowed down in 2022 but have propelled our chapter into new opportunities to raise awareness and support women in the fields of food, beverage and hospitality. I look forward to working together with you and continue to make great strides for girls and women in this amazing industry.  
with love and gratitude,  
Kathy G

## .....Events Calendar.....

Thursday, February 24	5:30-7:30 p.m. Innovation Depot Suite B117 1500 1st Ave. N	Kombucha School with Dame Nancey Legg
Friday, February 25	5 p.m. 903 Broadway St. Homewood	Sorelle Opening Party Dame Joy Smith
Tuesday, March 1	5-7 p.m. Juniper Forest Park	Mardi Gras Social \$25—includes two craft cocktails, light hor d’oeuvres, and king cake *Guests welcome! Please RSVP by Friday, February 25
Thursday, March 10	11:45 a.m Merrill Lynch Office 569 Brookwood Village, Ste. 501 (5th floor)	Financial Workshop for Women with Julie Helmers of Lathrop Helmers, Merrill Lynch Wealth Management and Elizabeth Brasher of Warren Averett



# A Quick but Meaningful and Memorable Trip to The Big Easy

by Susan Swagler

My trips to New Orleans always follow a few familiar patterns, habits we’ve formed over decades of visiting this beloved city.

On the way there, we stop in East New Orleans for banh mi sandwiches at Dong Phuong Bakery, a James Beard Award-winning Vietnamese restaurant and bakery. This NOLA East institution has been around since 1982 and has a cult following. For lunch during our visit, we find a new place (or a new old place) for po’ boys. This time, we tried Killer Poboys; we went to Big Killer on Dauphin and were not disappointed with their internationally inspired versions. We always stop in at M.S. Rau on Royal Street in the French Quarter. This incredible store is like a museum where everything—from paintings by Renoir to a 10-carat fancy blue diamond ring—is for sale. The art, alone, is worth a trip. And we always get beignets to go from Café du Monde in the French Market. (We get them in a bag so we can shake the powdered sugar evenly over the hot pastries, and then we go eat them by the water and watch the river traffic.)

Our latest trip, though, included two new experiences inspired by a book and a film.

In fact, the main reason for this visit was to dine at Mosquito Supper Club for my birthday. That became a wish after I saw the Mosquito Supper Club cookbook win “Cookbook of the Year” at the IACP conference here in Birmingham. It’s a beautifully written book that



*Beignets and coffee from Café du Monde are a New Orleans staple. We usually get ours to go.*

shares this self-taught chef’s love of Louisiana’s Cajun coast, a region that is in decline because of climate change and the resulting wetter, stronger storms. The photos of this special place are breathtaking, and the food pics are amazing.

Amazing enough to inspire our road trip.

So, we went to Melissa Martin’s restaurant, which is in a little Victorian cottage in Uptown. It’s filled with antiques; handmade furniture; and paintings by her brother Leslie, who is also a jazz pianist. Each night—Thursday to Sunday, September to June—Melissa does one communal seating (and two private ones). We were divided between two tables of 10 in adjoining rooms. Everyone enjoys the same multi-course menu. You can add wine pairings if you’d like. We did like. Here’s our menu from that night:

- Sweet Potato Biscuits with Steen’s Butter

- Murder Point Oysters with red wine vinegar mignonette (so proud to tell our dining partners about these fabulous oysters from home!)
- Fish Boulettes with tamarind glaze (paired with 2017 Les Parcelles “Tete Nat’ Igny Ruse”
- Velma Marie’s Oyster Soup with pain d’epi (paired with 2018 Montenidoli Canaiuolo Rosato)
- Grilled Napa and Arugula Salad with radish, parsley, pecans and broken shallot vinaigrette
- Red Snapper with Speckled Butterbeans (these beans were one of my favorite dishes of the night)
- Shrimp Jambalaya with Carolina Gold Rice (paired with 2020 Teutonic Wine Company’s “Pear Blossom Vineyard” Riesling
- Sweet Potato Pie with whipped cream (served with 1988 Casa Manoel Boullosa “Quinta dos Pesos” Carcavelos

Several of the dishes are in the beautiful cookbook; a serving of

that oyster soup was one of my birthday wishes come true. We made one other stop on our trip—and it was more about paying respect and educating ourselves than celebrating. We went to the Whitney Plantation about an hour west of New Orleans.

A few days before we left Birmingham, we watched the documentary *The Neutral Ground*, which is about the history of Confederate statues and why they divide us. The film, by comedian and journalist C.J. Hunt, also follows the removal of four Confederate statues from public spaces around New Orleans. Informative and quite funny at times, the film is well worth watching. (“Neutral ground” is what New Orleanians call the grassy median between two streets.)

Whitney Plantation was featured briefly in this film. Today, what was once a sugarcane, indigo and rice plantation is a memorial to the hundreds of thousands of slaves who labored and died in Louisiana. In fact, this museum is the only one in Louisiana with an exclusive focus on the lives of enslaved people.

The place is beautiful, which makes it even more haunting, as you gain a clearer understanding of what kinds of terrible and cruel lives the slaves lived on this sugarcane plantation. (Sugar production from sugarcane was intensely brutal and dangerous; the sugar districts of Louisiana were the only areas in the entire slave-holding South that had a negative birth rate among the slaves.)

The Big House (one of the earliest raised Creole cottages in the state and one of the best-preserved Creole plantation houses on the River Road) is open to visitors; so are some of the slave cabins. Beautiful but chilling hollow-eyed, terracotta statues of The Children of the



*Above: Chef Melissa Martin shares a recipe for fried soft-shell crabs in her cookbook. At right: The two communal tables are set at Mosquito Supper Club.*



Whitney haunt these grounds. The Field of Angels children’s memorial is heartbreaking yet lovely. It is dedicated to 2,200 enslaved children who died in St. John the Baptist Parish between the 1820s and the

1860s. That’s not a long time. The Wall of Honor is a memorial dedicated to all the people who were enslaved on the Whitney Plantation. The names and the information related to them



(origin, age, skills) were retrieved from original archives and engraved on granite slabs. The larger Allees Gwendolyn Midlo Hall is the name of the memorial dedicated to the 107, 000 people enslaved throughout Louisiana and documented in the “Louisiana Slave Database” built by Ms. Hall.

The memorial to the 1811 German Coast Uprising is, by far, the most shocking exhibit here. Dozens of Black, life-sized men’s heads stand on sticks in the ground. It’s a brutal display of unforgettable art. About 500 slaves—armed mostly with hand tools—participated in the uprising, which was the largest slave revolt in U.S. history. Their goal was to escape from the River Road plantations (including this one) to New Orleans. Most never made it that far. Many of the captured were killed — and their decapitated heads were put on sticks along the river to terrify and dissuade others.

The tour of Whitney Plantation is self-guided, so you can take your time and explore what you want for as long as you want. You just download an app and use your phone. I will say, in spite of the sadness of this place and the pain it evokes, I left feeling like I was part of something larger and more important than just myself. Definitely better educated, but also connected to a terribly painful time in history in a deeply empathetic way. As the narrator of your tour will tell you: “If you leave the plantation feeling guilty or angry, that means I have failed in my mission. Because this museum is about educating people about the past. It may be a very painful past, but we cannot hide history. Hidden history hurts.”

For more information, go to [www.whitneyplantation.com](http://www.whitneyplantation.com).



*Above: The Whitney Plantation honors the slaves who lived and worked here. At left: The Children of the Whitney are found throughout the grounds. Below: Arresting art is a memorial to the slaves who died in the largest slave revolt in U.S. history.*



# Rebecca Gann: Leveling the Culinary Playing Field

by Jessica Bennett

Dame Rebecca Gann has made a career of culinary event production; however, most of her experience has been large-scale food and wine festivals. In 2022 she made the move to more intimate and dynamic events as programming director for Indie Chefs Community.

“I have always wanted to pivot into a smaller, more frequent event and have watched the success of Indie Chefs events for years,” she said. “When I made the decision to start a new chapter in my career, a close chef friend of mine introduced me to the small team at Indie Chefs, and it was a great fit.”

Born from Indie Chefs Week, a traveling series of large-scale collaborative dinners taking place in 8-12 cities per year, the Indie Chefs Community was founded in 2017 with a mission to develop robust and equitable chef communities. Indie Chefs Community (ICC) offers smaller and more frequent programming intended to meld disparate chef communities into stronger, more cohesive networks

across various markets. In addition, ICC is planning a two-week event called COMMUNE in which the smaller events unite. COMMUNE is planned to take place in Houston in 2023.

Indie Chefs events are ticketed to the public, but the purpose is to place the chef first. ICC particularly wants to provide chefs with a memorable community experience, and the opportunity for culinary talent to network and strengthen industry relationships. The dinners are collaborative efforts intended to bring together diverse groups within the community—chefs are a mix of new and veteran, local and out-of-town, as well as various ages, backgrounds, and ethnicities. The development of those relationships is the part of the job that Rebecca finds most rewarding.

“I love working for an event whose entire motive is to put the chefs first—from covering all travel



and hotel, ingredients, and more, but also creating an event that rewards them in fun ways for just doing what they do each and every day.”

Until recently, the referral system for participating chefs has been a grassroots effort, with invitations for participating chefs coming from referrals within the existing chef network. ICC plans to announce an application process in spring 2022 with the goal of reaching a broader network of eligible chefs and more equal opportunity for participation.

“To be considered, we look for chefs that possess qualities such as being able to provide industry references, an understanding of dish composition and plating execution, experience with offsite events, and responsive communication. However, the most important thing is having a good attitude, being willing to work with others and truly participate in the weekend.”

Upcoming events, updates on COMMUNE, and the Indie Chefs newsletter can be found at [indiechefs.com](http://indiechefs.com).

## ..... Let's Toast .....

**Andrea Kirkland, MS, RD,** was featured in a special section, “New Year, New You”, of *Birmingham Home & Garden* magazine, January/February 2022 issue. She shared how readers can improve their nutritional intake and cooking skills for a sustainable lifestyle change.



**Nancey Legg,** owner of Better Kombucha, reports that Better Kombucha Apple is one of 244 companies nationwide chosen by the Good Food Foundation to win a 2022 Good Food Award. These awards celebrate environmentally and socially conscious food and beverage products of outstanding quality.



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