



Les Dames d'Escoffier
INTERNATIONAL



Founded in 2013

Ideibirmingham.org

Fall 2023

President's Note

Dear Dames,

And just like that... it's fall! Where has the summer gone? This past season of vacations and supposed relaxation has flown by, with time off quickly replaced by planning meetings, fresh faces, new menus, and work, work, work. Good thing as Dames we like to be busy!

This summer, our members have explored Iceland, France, Croatia, and Italy, and spent unforgettable time with family and friends in Mexico, North Carolina, Mississippi, California, and Florida. Meanwhile, at home, Dames have dug into the diversity of flavors right here in town with a tequila tasting at Mayawell, full menu samplers at the newly renovated Great Wall Restaurant, rosé research at Golden Age Wines and a tea talk at the Market at Pepper Place.

The LDEI Membership Committee interviewed 16 stellar new candidates this summer, a reminder that talented women are gaining ground in this industry and want to help others do the same. We've made progress in establishing an endowment for our chapter, something very few have been able to achieve. We've committed to deeper partnerships with organizations that align with our mission to help

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Celebrating 10 Years!

Our chapter celebrates a decade of hard work and looks toward the future.



At the annual meeting on Sunday, August 13, we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the founding of our chapter with cake made by Dame Telia Johnson and Champagne. See page 2 for more.



Celebrating 10 Years!

The Birmingham chapter of Les Dames d'Escoffier International was founded in August 2013 by a group of 55 women from a variety of careers in food, beverage, and hospitality. It was the largest initial membership in the history of the organization.

In the last 10 years, our chapter has grown—we now have 101 members—and we have created a robust program of outreach that includes partnerships with the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama; GirlSpring; and The WellHouse, which provides a safe haven for female victims of human trafficking.

We have also been successful in our fundraising over the years, creating an event—Champagne & Fried Chicken—that many look forward to each year and that fuels our grant and scholarship program. Since it began eight years ago, we have awarded nearly \$160,000 in business grants and college scholarships to hundreds of women across the state. We've also established an endowment that will help ensure future giving. We have a lot to be proud of and so much more to look forward to!

"The impact of our chapter's growth and giving is being felt across the state, and it's working!" said Birmingham chapter President Leigh Sloss-Corra. "Businesses and organizations call us first for leadership and problem-solving. They know we will deliver, and the food and drinks will be superb!"



We celebrated our 10th year with Champagne and cake from Dame Telia Johnson, which is always a favorite.

Founding Members

Of the 55 women who founded our chapter in 2013, there are 17 who are still current, active members.

- Brooke Bell
- Rosalyn Bloomston
- Alexis Douglas
- Sherron Goldstein
- Maureen Holt
- Martha Johnston
- Cathy Sloss Jones
- Betsy McAtee
- Gia McCollister
- Kathy G. Mezrano
- Susan Nash
- Kay Reed
- Becky Satterfield
- Pardis Stitt
- Susan Swagler
- Pat Terry
- Rachel West

The Latest Details on this Year's Champagne & Fried Chicken

by Jessica Bennett

Fresh changes and returning favorites abound during preparations for 2023's annual Champagne and Fried Chicken fundraiser. This year's festivities have a new destination—Pepper Place Market. The pickup line for totes will open at 4 p.m. on October 1st, at 2700 2nd Avenue South, and terminate in the parking lot where Pepper Place Market happens every Saturday. Guests are encouraged to enjoy their totes on site during the Picnic at Pepper Place event.

Food committee chairs Lindsey Noto King and Kay Reed plan an ambitious change to the programming this year with chicken to be cooked on site. A refrigerated truck will form the walk-in cooler of a mobile kitchen, and fryers will operate during the event to produce 2,000 pieces of fried chicken. The chicken has been generously donated by Sysco.

The fried chicken will once again feature gluten-free seasonings from Dame Crystal Peterson of Yo' Mama's, but vegetarians will have expanded options this year with the returning vegetable frittata and an additional pesto pasta salad, both from Dame Joy Smith of Sorelle Café & Catering.

Sides include a new potato salad with shallot vinaigrette from Kathy G & Co. and Tre Luna catering, as well as chef Rita Bernhardt's kale salad, featuring greens from Snow's Bend Farm. Chef Lindsey Noto King will add southern pickles to the tote this year. The fruit and



Some changes and upgrades are coming to this year's fundraiser, including increasing the number of totes we are offering to 400. Pickup this year will be from 4 to 6 p.m. but everyone is welcome to join us at Pepper Place picnic tables until 7 p.m.

cheese board from Iz Weddings and Events, as well as Eastaboga Honey from beekeeper Justin Hill both return once again. Ashley Mac's will provide biscuits, and baker Corey Hinkel will offer demi-baguettes.

Dessert offerings will expand this year as well. Dreamland Bar-B-Que's homemade banana pudding returns to the tote, with the addition of a French lavender pound cake from Emily's Heirloom Pound Cakes or Champagne macarons from Bandit Pâtisserie.

French crémant will come with every tote, and guests will have the option to exchange take-home bottles for chilled bottles to be served in the picnic area. Stone Hollow Farmstead will complete the offering with their popular dahlias.

Add-on items are available for

guests as well. Dame Charbett Cauthen and her team have gathered 27 gift certificates, each valued at \$100, from local restaurants to be raffled off with a \$25 donation. Cocktail kits featuring a New Orleans-style coconut punch courtesy of Crown Royal and a spicy paloma from 21 Seeds will be available for purchase as well. Cocktails will be produced by Dames Laura Newman and Jessica Bennett.

The Social Media Committee plans to enhance pre-event coverage through higher-profile sponsor spotlights and teasers, both on social media and through newspaper, television, and radio spots.

"We see the promotion of the event as not just a means to sell out

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on baskets,” said Dame Christiana Roussel, “we also see it as a way to raise awareness of our chapter’s work in mentoring and supporting the next generation of women in food, wine, and hospitality.”

The Birmingham chapter’s giving in grants and scholarships totaled over \$40,000 in 2022, and this year’s push for sponsorships is no less ambitious. Currently committed sponsors include Morgan Stanley/ Bethy & David Heath, Alabama Power, Satterfield & Pontikes Construction, Inc., *Birmingham Business Journal*, Jane D. and Gary C. Youngblood, Enterprise Holdings Foundation, Protective Life, YellaWood, The Caring Foundation, Martha Johnston, TACALA Companies, Canary Gallery LLC & Gus’s Hot Dogs Downtown, Tarpon Dock Seafood/Greg Abrams Seafood, Inc., Metro Companies, Lathrop Helmers Group of Peritus Wealth Management, Waverly Advisors, LLC, The Kelly Hotel, and Sloss Sisters in memory of Carolyn Lowrey Sloss.

All donations for totes, raffle tickets, and cocktail kits, as well as simple monetary donations, are processed through the Give Live-ly website, which doesn’t charge any fees, allowing all of the profits raised to be put to good use. A link to the donation site can be found on LDEIBirmingham.org.



Above: Two new cocktail kits will be on offer this year for a \$25 donation.

At right: The chicken will be fried on site this year.

Below: The bubbly can be enjoyed on site at Pepper Place.



The Market at Pepper Place Spotlights LDEI in September

by Leigh Sloss-Corra

This September will mark the 7th Annual Women in Food Month Spotlight, aka “Les Dames Market Takeover,” at the Market at Pepper Place. Sponsored by the law firm Jones Walker, this year’s focus on different cuisines will span 5 weeks, from September 2nd to September 30th. Each Saturday at the Market will have a different theme. In keeping with the theme, Dames will staff a tent with market goods and lead the popular cooking demo, “In the Kitchen,” at 9 a.m.

“We are thrilled to spotlight LDEI again for Women in Food Month,” said Market Executive Director and LDEI Birmingham Chapter President Leigh Sloss-Corra. “Lots of our vendors are Dames too, so it ends up being a market-wide celebration. The Market has experienced record attendance this season too, and our social media reach is off the charts. It should be a great event.”

During the Market, Dames will also be selling tickets for the Champagne & Fried Chicken picnic fundraiser happening at Pepper Place on Sunday, October 1, from 4 - 7 p.m. Proceeds from the bake sales will fund the organization’s cooking and nutrition instruction outreach program at The WellHouse, which aids female victims of sex trafficking.

This year’s themes will be:

• **9/2: Tailgates and Picnics**, spotlighting Dames known for BBQ, tailgate dishes, and classic picnic foods. *Chef demo:* Geri-Martha O’Hara of Big Spoon Creamery, at 9 a.m.



Dames Cheryl Slocum, Gia McCollister, Rosalyn Bloomston, Kristal Bryant (who also did a chef demo), Kathy G. Mezrano, and Leigh Sloss-Corra participated in last year’s Market Takeover.

• **9/9: Sweet Treats Week**, spotlighting Dames who are pastry chefs and bakers. *Chef demo:* Emily Nabors Hall of The Breakup Cookie and Jasmine Smith of Dotdash Meredith Food Studios, at 9 a.m.

• **9/16: “Club Med” Week**, spotlighting Dames with Mediterranean culinary roots and specialties—Italian, Greek, Israeli, Lebanese, and Middle Eastern. *Chef demo:* Dame Rita Bernhardt of Luca and Tasty Town, at 9 a.m.

• **9/23: Latin Food Week**, spotlighting Dames who specialize in Latin cuisine and honoring Hispanic Heritage Month. *Chef demo:* Dame Dulce Rivera of Mi Pueblo, at 9 a.m.

• **9/30: Healthy Food Week**, spotlighting Dame dietitians, nutritionists, and healthy-eating instructors. *Chef demo:* Clara Darling of Samford University Wellness Kitchen, at 9 a.m.

Dames should donate, help, shop, and spread the word for this fun month-long program, which will also help promote our big fundraiser, Champagne & Fried Chicken. More details can be found at pepperplacemarket.com, in the Market newsletter, and on social media posts @marketatpepperplace and @ldeibirmingham. The Market is free and open to all, 7 a.m.-noon every Saturday, rain or shine.

Inaugural FOOD+Culture Fest Around the Corner

by Rebecca Gann

Led by a handful of local Dames, the inaugural year of Birmingham's FOOD+Culture Fest is weeks away and tickets are going quickly! A year's worth of planning is coming to fruition in the form of a brand new four-day weekend celebrating the culinary and cultural landscape of our city and region, October 12-15, 2023. Featuring five signature events, an amplified Market at Pepper Place, and more than ten collaborative dining experiences around town, this is a weekend you won't want to miss. Tickets are on sale now at bhamfoodplus.com.

Included in the weekend festivities is FOOD+Flair: Changing the Menu, a seated multi-course lunch event presented by Birmingham LDEI. The lunch celebrates females in the industry who are breaking barriers and paving the way for the future. Featuring an all-female lineup, the event will be led by host and notable author, Toni Tipton-Martin, and feature over ten other female food and beverage professionals during the course of the event, and several local Dames. The event is open to Dames and non-Dames, kicking off with passed bites and signature cocktails, followed by a seated four-course lunch enjoyed over discussion celebrating female culinarians. Tickets are \$85 and all members of the Birmingham Chapter are encouraged to attend, and invite a friend!

Other weekend highlights include:

- FOOD+Frank, a happy hour reception celebrating the foundation of the Frank Stitt Award for Indus-



try Excellence at the Birmingham Museum of Art. Passed bites, iconic cocktails and recognition of this year's recipient, Chef Frank Stitt himself.

- FOOD+Heritage, a seated family-style dinner in the streets of Pepper Place, celebrating Black chefs, culture and foodways and their impact on our city's—and our country's—culinary identity. Expect a mix of local and regional acclaimed chefs, including the first Black male and female chefs to earn a Michelin star. The dinner will be paired with wines by a Master Sommelier and woven throughout the evening will be discussion along with cultural, musical, and artistic components.

- FOOD+Farmers at the Market at Pepper Place, an amplified Saturday market experience, with live demos, free tasting samples from local chefs, a storyteller's garden at OvenBird Restaurant, cookbook signings and more. This event is unticketed.
 - FOOD+Fire, presented by *Southern Living*. A walk-around, daytime tasting event celebrating the BBQ community and tailgate culture of the South. 30 chefs and pitmasters, live-fire cooking, a Hop City Craft Beer Garden, live music and a Southern Living Demo Stage.
 - FOOD+Funk, Sunday Brunch featuring biscuits, brass and bloodies. Ten top pastry chefs and biscuit bakers, five local mixologists shaking up a play on a breakfast cocktail and music by the Grammy-award-winning Rebirth Brass Band.
 - FOOD+Friends Dinner Series, over ten dining experiences taking place at participating restaurants around the city. Host chefs will welcome a guest chef friend of theirs into their kitchen for one-night-only collaborative menu items. These dinners are unticketed, and first-come, first-serve on a reservation or walk-in basis.
- FOOD+Culture Fest's board of directors includes Dames Cathy Sloss Jones, Cheryl Slocum, and Leigh Sloss-Corra. Dame Rebecca Gann is the Festival Programming Director, and Dame Nancy Hopkins of the NYC Chapter, and former President of IACP, is also involved. Several local Dames are participating in various events throughout the weekend as featured talent. For the full roster of chefs, please visit the website at bhamfoodplus.com.

Naan But the Brave: Dames Learn About Indian Cooking



by Donna Cornelius

A happy little band of Dames gathered for our July meet-up at the Samford Wellness Kitchen to learn a new culinary skill: Indian cooking.

Led by our wonderful Dame Clara Darling, the class had an intriguing menu: chicken tikka masala, spiced basmati rice, home-made naan, and roasted peaches with annatto cream.

After Clara gave us an informative intro to Indian food and introduced us to her talented and extremely patient assistant, Harper Simmons, we divided into small teams to start cooking, with one group (who shall remain nameless) losing valuable time because we—er, they—got slowed up by taking a short break to sample the hot-out-of-the-pan naan. This is why we had to just

The July meet-up, hosted by Dame Clara Darling, at Samford Wellness Kitchen, focused on Indian cuisine. New member, Dame Rebecca Denson, shared her expertise, too.



glop our rice on the plates rather than presenting it in an artful mound like Gia's group. After the class, we all sat down to enjoy the fruits of our labor. As a bonus, new Dame Rebecca Denson,

owner of Sachai Tea Co., treated us to a delicious specialty mocktail. I think most of us agreed that while cooking together is so much fun, eating the results together is even better!

Dames on the Plains: Susan Notter and Geri-Martha O'Hara are Guest Teachers



by Donna Cornelius

For those of us who have not-so-fond college memories of slogging our way through courses like calculus, statistics and world civilization, taking a class in ice cream or chocolate seems like a sweet but impossible dream.

But for some lucky students in Auburn University’s Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management, that dream became a reality thanks to three Birmingham Dames.

Geri-Martha O’Hara of Big Spoon Creamery and Susan Notter of Elizabeth Moore Chocolates both were guest instructors in Ana Planá’s class in the school’s Tony and Libba Rane Culinary Science Center.

Geri-Martha was in the group of Dames who toured the spectacular Auburn facility in March, and she was eager to visit Ana’s class when students needed help with ice cream and custards.

“I worked with them for a full day,” Geri-Martha said. “I told them

Above: Dame Susan Notter taught a class on tempering, and the students made chocolate boxes decorated with chocolate roses. At right: Dame Geri-Martha O’Hara taught students the art of ice cream making.



my story and taught them how to build an ice cream properly. We made four or five different formulas, spun them, and then enjoyed eating them.”

She thinks the students thoroughly enjoyed their experience.

“A lot of them were working in restaurants around Auburn, like

Acre and SpringHouse, and they said they couldn’t wait to share what they learned,” Geri-Martha said.

Susan connected with the Auburn program when she toured the new facility with fellow Dame Gia McCollister—and experienced a real blast from the past. She was

surprised to see her old friend and colleague Antony Osborne, an award-winning pastry chef from Wales. The former pastry chef of the famous Raffles hotel in Singapore, Osborne is now director of culinary training and innovation at Auburn.

“He was really my main contact there,” Susan said.

During her visit to Ana’s class, Susan taught the students how to make chocolate boxes decorated with roses.


“I gave them a good introduction to tempering, and we made modeling chocolate for the roses,” Susan said. “They also learned how to cut out the pieces for their boxes and how to assemble them. I think we all had fun.”

Her teaching experience isn’t Susan’s only link to Auburn. She delivers her chocolates and pate de fruits (fruit jellies) to 1856, the high-end restaurant in the Rane building.

Geri-Martha also had a return engagement when she was invited back to judge cakes made by Ana’s pastry class students.

Both Geri-Martha and Susan said they were very impressed with the Auburn culinary facility, and both wouldn’t mind teaching there again. Geri-Martha has another reason for wanting to go back.

“I loved eating in the food court,” she said. “That was the best pizza I’ve ever had, even when I was living in New York.”

.....	<i>Events Calendar</i>	
Every Saturday in September	The Market at Pepper Place	Dames takeover the Market demos
Thursday, Sept. 12	The Gardens Cafe by Kathy G. 4:30 to 6:30 p.m.	LDEI New Member Reception
Thursday, Sept. 21	Cantina Tortilla Grill 162 Oxmoor Road 5:30 to 7 p.m.	LDEI Member Social with Aimee Castro RSVP and Venmo Aimee \$30 for Mexican favorites (chips, salsa, guacamole, and queso) and 2 margaritas
	Aimee Castro @sol-y-luna-3  venmo	
Friday, Sept. 29	BJCC East Ballroom 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.	LDEI at the Birmingham Business Journal’s Women’s Summit
Saturday, Sept. 30	Linn Park noon to 8 p.m.	LDEI at Fiesta Birmingham
Sunday, October 1	The Market at Pepper Place 4 to 7 p.m.	Champagne & Fried Chicken fundraiser
Thursday, October 5 - Sunday, October 8	Louisville, Kentucky	Les Dames d’Escoffier International Annual Conference
Thursday, October 12 - Sunday, October 15	See page 6 for more details	FOOD+Culture Fest
Wednesday, Oct. 25	Auburn University	LDEI at Culinary Career Fair
Tuesday November 14	5:30 - 7 p.m. Location TBD	Beer Tasting
Monday December 11	Bistro 218 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.	LDEI Holiday Party

other women and go beyond scholarships and entrepreneur grants. What began with monthly volunteering at the Community Food Bank has evolved into co-hosting their annual gala, and establishing an annual LDEI scholarship. Inspiring and mentoring the young members of GirlSpring has led to more involvement with their programs and speaking opportunities for our members. The tiny team who offered to teach nutrition and basic cooking to women at The WellHouse two years ago has grown into an active committee of 18. A recent meeting with The WellHouse's leadership confirmed our efforts are making an impact that will be recognized with other benefactors and donors in their annual report.

The September spotlight on LDEI chefs and food producers that began 7 years ago at the Market at Pepper Place has turned into the primary fundraiser for our WellHouse

outreach project. Our market take-overs meaningfully promote LDEI and our programs and help us identify entrepreneur grant recipients and new members. The Market helps us and we help the Market: that's partnership! So, partnering with the new FOOD+Culture Fest made perfect sense. How could a major food festival succeed in this city without our involvement? Our chapter will now "host" the women's luncheon, FOOD+Flair: How Women are Changing the Menu, Thursday, October 12th, with Dames and out-of-town female guests preparing the food and drinks, pairing the wines and leading a women-focused presentation.

Meanwhile we get invitations every day from organizations and major events that want to tap into our collective talent, power, and value. Will you help us with this, can you provide judges for that? We could say yes to all of them, if we weren't so busy opening new restaurants; publishing

cookbooks; launching culinary programs; competing for (and winning) industry pastry, mixology, and food writing awards; and advocating for each other—things you'll read about in this newsletter and in the press.

Since our chapter's founding 10 years ago, we've demonstrated to Birmingham and the world that positive transformation is possible when women are in charge. Let's take a moment to celebrate our accomplishments, and then we can get back to what each of us does best. There's a lot still to do to make this year's Champagne & Fried Chicken the success we're planning. We'll toast and learn and toast some more at the LDEI conference in Louisville the following week. FOOD+Culture Fest is the week after that, and then, hold on to your hats, because the holidays are coming. Let's roll! Happy 10th anniversary and happy fall, y'all.

Cheers,
Leigh Sloss-Corra

Dames Share Their Expertise at GirlSpring Event

Dames Cheryl Slocum, Andrea Kirkland, Melissa Gray, Maureen Holt, and Cristina Almanza partnered with GirlSpring to host a mother-daughter event at the Vestavia Hills Library in the Forest on June 24th.

The fun-filled program introduced the girls to women in the culinary and hospitality industries. During the hands-on workshop, the girls explored different flavors through a sensory tasting activity, developed their own recipes, and wrote a creative personal food story about their new recipe.



Favorite Things Party is Always a Favorite

by Susan Swagler

Our annual Favorite Things party has become one of our favorite things. That's because it's about more than just the things—although they are always fun. The gathering allows us to get to know more about each other and brings us closer as a chapter.

On Thursday, August 24, from 5:30 to 7 p.m., a dozen or so members gathered at the John Hand Building for fellowship and fun.

Sommelier Alexis Douglas organized this event, so you know the wine was excellent. She had beautiful charcuterie for nibbling, and we even had some French bubbles to taste test for Champagne & Fried Chicken.

The favorite things are always interesting choices; they are made even more so as members explain the "why" behind them.

This year's favorite things ranged from practical (Savannah Bee Co. hand cream from Rebel Negley, leather "cord tacos" from Betsy McAtee, a wine cooler and eye mask from Alexis Douglas, Caldera Rosewater Driftwood room spray from Susan Swagler) to beautiful (framed leaf art from Leigh Sloss-Corra and a Tena Payne bowl from Kathy G.) to highly personal (family recipes and favorite kitchen items from Leslie Register) to simply fun (a popcorn popper from Barbara Kenyon and statement earrings from Audrey Pannell).

The most popular (and most stolen) items this year: the Tena Payne serving piece, a Houdini electric wine opener from Pam Lolley and two beautiful handmade clay bowls from Dulce Rivera of Mi Pueblo.



Above: Dames gathered for the favorite party of the year at the John Hand Building. At right: The food and the French bubbles were both excellent. Attendees got to sample options for Champagne & Fried Chicken



Over the years, we've shared details of this event with other LDEI chapters, telling them what a great bonding experience it is. Here's how we do it: Each member brings one favorite thing (valued at around \$20). The things are wrapped, so we don't know who brought them.

We draw numbers and take turns picking out an item. Once revealed, the person who brought the item explains why it is a favorite thing. During this past event, in the interest of time, we allowed Items to be stolen only one time before they were "frozen."

..... Behind the Scenes

Cristina Almanza: A Lifelong Learner

By Jan Walsh

Cristina Almanza seems to be everywhere all at once. She's involved in many organizations and projects around Birmingham. Here, get to know her a little better.

How and when did you make Birmingham home? I moved to Birmingham in 2013, right as all of the great things were starting in town. Regions Field was being built and Railroad Park was starting to become one of the first multi-purpose green spaces in town.

Tell me about your past and present with Buffalo Rock.

I was recruited by our CEO, Matthew Dent, in 2015 to become part of the sales team and help with our social media and community engagement for our Birmingham franchise. When I started working at Buffalo Rock's Birmingham franchise, I was the youngest person there. I was a woman. And then, of course, I was Hispanic.

Working at Buffalo Rock has been a great experience. It was during my tenure at Buffalo Rock that I also became a U.S. citizen. I was able to share this pivotal moment in my life with my coworkers.

As an immigrant, it was also a really neat experience because I almost became somewhat of an ambassador—I was able to share and teach my coworkers about the different traditions and food that we have in Mexico. Some of my coworkers were able to taste and experience real Mexican food including street tacos! It was an opportunity for them to



Cristina was able to celebrate her U.S. citizenship on with her Buffalo Rock team. She was able to share with them all of the details about and intricacies of the immigration process.

also learn about the immigration process, because a lot of them really did not have any idea of what the immigration process was like, or they really didn't understand the intricacies when you are working as a foreign exchange student. I have also been able to share insights about the USA's growing Hispanic market segment with a buying power of over \$2.5 trillion. I'm also very proud to say that I am a founding member of Buffalo Rock's Inclusion Committee.

One of my proudest moments at Buffalo Rock has been the opportunity to connect and help small businesses grow including many in our Hispanic community. In 2021, I was offered the opportunity to become the Corporate Business Development for On Premise

Coffee, Tea, and Allied Sales. I have recently also become responsible for our condiments and cup sales. One of the things that I love about my job is that it has allowed me to work with people of all walks of life and grow our coffee and tea presence in our footprint (Alabama, East Georgia, and the Florida Panhandle).

I am proud to say that during my tenure as corporate director, our coffee and tea line has grown over 18% in the past three years.

You also have your own business. How did this start and when? Tell me all about it.

In 2012, I decided to create my own business, Cristina Almanza LLC. I started my business as a way to

leverage my marketing, design, sales, and web experience. I was aware that our Hispanic community was growing in Alabama and that there was a need for people who could bridge the gap between the cultures. I have worked on many projects; I recently translated and voiced the Alabama River Keeper Fish Advisory Line and have translated the website and recorded videos in Spanish for the City of Birmingham.

Wow! I see you have many certifications, degrees, and awards. Please share! Don't be shy...

I'm an avid believer that the moment that we stop learning we become obsolete. Continuous improvement is what helps us grow. I am proud to have earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in graphic design, as well a Master's Degree in business administration from Jacksonville State University.

In 2013, I received a web design and development certificate from Emory University, and I earned an Accredited Public Relations Professional (APR), a national certification in September 2015. During the summer of 2019, I was invited to be part of The Chief Marketing Officer Institute Executive Leadership Program, and I completed the certification in July 2020.

I have been very fortunate and honored to be recognized. Three weeks ago, I had the honor to be the first recipient of The Women of Influence Business Summit—A Women of Influence Award, "For Her Unshakable Perseverance and Outstanding Service In The Birmingham Community." Last year NBC-13 featured my story, during Hispanic Heritage Month, in their Women Breaking Bar-



Cristina is very involved in Fiesta Bham, which hosts a yearly festival celebrating and educating the public on the diversity within the Latin American countries represented in Alabama. Fiesta also raises funds for their scholarship fund—the above is of last year's scholarship winners—for deserving Latino students in Alabama who are pursuing higher education in the field of their choice.

riers (<https://www.wvtm13.com/article/hispanic-heritage-buffalo-rock-cristina-almanza-mexico/41397199#>). In 2020, I also became one of the *Birmingham Business Journal's* Top 40 Under 40 class, and in 2021 I was recognized as the Diversity Leader for the Minority Business Awards. I have also been awarded the HandsOn Birmingham Ignite Corporate Volunteer of the Year Award in 2019.

I am a graduate of Leadership Hoover and currently serve as one of its board members. I have participated in several community projects, such as the Birmingham Taco Fest and Birmingham Día de Los Muertos. Currently, I am secretary and board member for Alabama PRSA, and a board member and past president for Fiesta Bham, as well as a member of LDEI.

On the personal side, please share a glimpse into your private life, family, home, hobbies, etc.

As any good Mexican, I love to eat and drink good food with family and friends. I am passionate about supporting local businesses, especially when it comes to eating locally, of course with a delicious Pepsi. And yes! I am blessed to have a job that allows me to connect with our culinary scenes. It is this quest to eat local food that fuels my desire to travel and learn new cultures. I also attribute this to JSU's International House program, where I met a lot of people from all around the world and have been able to visit with them. And even though, I live away from my blood-related family I stay in touch with them.

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I am married to Jerrod Brown. He was one of the first people I met at JSU, and we dated for 10 years before we got married the week before the pandemic started in 2020. We have two black kitties, and we love to travel. My husband and I have an ongoing list of places we would like to see. When I became a U.S. citizen, Jerrod gifted me a U.S. National Parks Passport. Every National Park has a stamp, and my goal is to visit all our National Parks. Last year I was able to get a stamp for Mount Rushmore. So far this year, we have traveled to Italy, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, and Turkey with my family and our priest.

A fun fact about us is that even though Jerrod and I got married in March of 2020, we have now been married four times in three different countries; we got married in Hoover, Alabama; Torreon, COAH, Mexico; and in May, during our trip to Israel, our priest remarried all of us (8 couples) while visiting The Wedding Church at Cana, (where Jesus turned water into wine). Jerrod and I are also huge Sidewalk Film Festival fans; we are looking forward to attending in a couple of weeks. In addition to that I have a group of seven amazing girlfriends that call ourselves the “Traveling Latinas.” Two weekends ago we went to Pensacola to celebrate one of our friend’s “Baby Moon.”

Anything else you would like to include... A cool and fun fact is that In 2019 I had a drink named after me, “The Cristina Almanza.” It was featured at the Atomic Bar until it closed.



Fun fact: Cristina and her husband, Jerrod Brown, had four weddings. Above, from their wedding in Hoover. At right, from Mexico, and below, from Israel



Dames Featured at Women of Influence Business Summit



At this year’s Women of Influence Business Summit on Saturday, July 23, Dame Nancey Legg was a keynote speaker (above left). The theme of the summit was “Developing a Growth Mindset,” and Nancey spoke about her journey in deciding to start Better Kombucha later in life, her hurdles, and her determination to put faith in God when starting a new business and new career. Her journey and her story were inspiring to all who were present. Nancey continues to shine and showcase the talent and caliber of the women that we have representing us as Dames.

Additionally, Cristina Almanza was honored as the first recipient of The Women Of Influence Business Summit—A Women of Influence Award (above right), “For her unshakable perseverance and outstanding service in the Birmingham community.” Wendy Anger, the organizer of The Women Of Influence Business Summit, said Cristina was being honored for her “outstanding work in our community and as a trailblazer in the business industry. Not only just representing women, but also as a bold example in the Hispanic community. You are breaking barriers, and you embody everything that we believe and want to promote.”



Carolina Cuisine: Highlands and Cashiers Offer Great Food and Spectacular Scenery

by Donna Cornelius

If you're looking for a getaway destination that's appealing both distance-wise and food-wise, think about heading to two neighboring towns in the mountains of North Carolina: Highlands and Cashiers. Some people visit to experience the area's fresh air, cool temps, spectacular waterfalls and the outdoor activities like golf, hiking and tennis. My favorite activity is indoors: eating at one of the many restaurants you'll find there. I comfort myself by saying I can work off my gluttony with a robust hike. (I don't always do this, but I do think about it really hard.)

Here are a few of our favorite places in Highlands and Cashiers. You'll find that one shining star on many menus is the locally caught rainbow trout, so try it at least once. But there's a great variety of food to sample. From my experience, eating in Highlands and Cashiers is kind of like eating in New Orleans: You really have to try hard to get a bad meal.

One note: Some restaurants are closed during the winter months, so check before you go. Reservations are highly recommended for most places. In the late spring, summer and fall, try to reserve a spot well before you go.

Highlands

- **Wild Thyme Gourmet:** Open for lunch and dinner, this little restaurant on Highlands' Main Street offers American food with Asian



The Library Restaurant and Bar, located on the grounds of the Sapphire Valley Resort in Cashiers, deftly combines old and new, serving innovative food in a charming 1864 farmhouse.

influences (the chef/owner is from Nepal). A smart starter is the risotto shrimp fritter, and my favorite main dish is an imaginative take on pot pie: salmon over puff pastry with snow peas, carrots and a lemon-caper sauce. For more info, visit www.wildthymegourmet.com.

- **Lakeside:** Housed in a cottage, this 34-year-old restaurant focuses on seafood but has plenty of other treats, too. We usually can't resist Lakeside's version of rainbow trout,

simply sauteed in wine, lemon and butter. The tuna tartare nachos and the wild berry-goat cheese salad are tasty and light ways to begin your meal. A word to the wise: Because the tables are very close together here, it's maybe not the best place for kids unless they can keep a low profile – a category into which my grandchildren unfortunately do not fall. www.lakesiderestaurant.info.

- **Wolfgang's:** No, this restaurant doesn't belong to Wolfgang Puck.

It's named for its owner and chef, German-born Wolfgang Green. The menu isn't lengthy but still packs a punch, with a Bavarian sampler that includes bratwurst, knockwurst and a schnitzel. In addition to the grilled offerings of steaks, you'll find venison au poivre with a Montrachet rosti potato and lingonberry demi-glace. www.wolfgangsgreen.net.

- **Ristorante Paoletti's:** Italian favorites get a little fancy at this family-owned restaurant. Intriguing choices are the roasted beet and orange salad, elk rib chop, and the cannelloni filled with ground veal, spinach and ricotta. The story on the restaurant's website of the Paoletti family, who immigrated from their home in Italy and arrived at Ellis Island in 1930, is worth a read. www.paolettis.com.

Cashiers

- **The Library:** It's hard to choose a favorite Highlands/Cashiers restaurant among so many good choices, but if pressed, I'd have to pick this one. Housed in a farmhouse that was built in 1864, the restaurant has a seasonal menu that's always fresh and never boring. Examples of the chef's creativity are ranch dressing-flavored cracklings with pickled watermelon, venison and black Angus beef chili, and black truffle-flavored mac and cheese.

We like the small plates because you can get more than one. Whatever desserts are on offer, save room for one—you won't be disappointed. www.librarykitchenandbar.com.

- **The Orchard:** The setting here adds to the restaurant's charm; porch and patio tables overlook an actual apple orchard and lovely gardens. A heavenly app is Whiteside brie—St. Andre triple cream brie with house-made port wine blue-

No, these fat fellows at the Cashiers Farmers' Market don't represent the Cornelius family's tendency toward gluttony when we visit Cashiers and Highlands. They let folks know that the market also has take-home barbecue: pork, brisket, ribs, smoked turkey and sides.



berry preserves, sliced apples, and walnuts. The Orchard has quite a few different preparations of trout as well as vegetable options such as wild mushroom-filled ravioli and garden risotto topped with goat cheese-stuffed mushrooms. www.theorchardcashiers.com.

- **Canyon Kitchen:** Another beautiful setting—Lonesome Valley, where this restaurant is housed in a rustic bar, is surrounded by 1,000-foot granite walls. Small plates include dishes like barbecue smoked lamb ribs and buffalo quail, with larger plates such as Niman Ranch Iberico pork chop and Cheerwine-braised short ribs. Everything is artfully presented, especially the sweets, so be sure to ask for a dessert menu. www.lonesomevalley.com.

On the Casual Side

- **Mica's:** If you're traveling with children, this Cashiers favorite is casual enough for little ones to feel comfortable but with solid dishes for the adults to enjoy. Fireplaces make Mica's cozy during cold weather. Adding to the mountain cabin feeling of the place, we noticed photos of bears displayed in the lobby and were a little disconcerted when the hostess told us the pictures had been taken right behind the restaurant. My favorite thing to order is the salmon BLT—why more places don't offer this, I don't know—and the Greek and loaded white pizzas are family favorites. Visit the restaurant's Facebook page for more info.

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• Ugly Dog Pub: With locations in both Cashiers and Highlands, this fun gastropub is where you'll want to eat if you're visiting in the fall and want to keep up with televised college football games. The blue cheese potato chips are obviously a winner, having been on the menu since 2010. The burgers are tasty and hearty; for lighter fare, choose the quinoa salad with dried apricots, feta, and pumpkin seeds. www.theuglydogpub.com.

And Not Far Away...

The small community of Sapphire is about a 20-minute drive from downtown Cashiers, and Osteria del Monte is well worth the trip. You can start with escargot or prosciutto with melon, move on to linguine with a classic clam sauce, and, if you still have room, finish with one of several veal dishes or salmon with capers, green olives, onions and plum tomatoes. www.osteriadelmonte-nc.com.

About another 20 minutes past Sapphire is the lovely village of Brevard, which is known for its white squirrels. You can see these little fellows in person at several spots around town, including Brevard College and Franklin Park. You also can see them in a sweet version at Downtown Chocolates, an artisan shop in the middle of Brevard. While you're in town, try Quixote Fine Cuisine, with an extremely dog-friendly patio. (My dog is generally better behaved than my aforementioned grandchildren.) Recipes here have a Guadalupean flair; one of my favorites is called momias—bacon-wrapped shrimp with mango sauce and served with poblano pepper spaghetti. Yes, spaghetti—it's really good! Find Down-

You can find a variety of tomatoes among the bountiful summer offerings at the Cashiers Farmers' Market, which also has ready-to-eat dishes, cheeses, jellies, sauces and more.



town Chocolates on Facebook, and get more info about Quixote at www.quixotebrevard.com.

Northwest of Cashiers and Highlands is Franklin, where Root & Barrel Kitchen serves a lovely lunch as well as dinner—dry-aged burgers, salmon gnocchi and the Soul Bowl, with black beans, sweet potato, jasmine rice, pecans, pickled onions and a tahini maple dressing. If you're a fan of the "Outlander" books and TV show, you won't want to miss the town's Scottish Tartans Museum and Heritage Center. Too bad they don't have Jamie Fraser in the flesh, but if you have Scottish roots, the friendly staff can help you find your family's tartan. www.rootandbarrel.com; www.scottishtartansmuseum.org.

Other Food Finds

On our way to or from Highlands and Cashiers, we can't resist stopping at the Blue Ridge Honey Co. It's actually in Lakemont, Georgia, but it's right off Interstate 85 N, the highway that runs from Atlanta to the Highlands area. We've loved

every flavor we've tried, from sourwood to gallberry. You also can buy candles, the best little honey-flavored hard candies, and bee-keeping supplies here. www.blueridgehoneycompany.com.

The main grocery game in town is Ingles in Cashiers. The reason I'm mentioning it is because of one item: the peanut butter and banana ice cream from Premium Farms, and it will help satisfy your sweet tooth until Geri-Martha opens up a Big Spoon Creamery in North Carolina! In Highlands, Mountain High Grocery has specialty items and good ready-to-eat options.

Open only seasonally, the Cashiers Farmers' Market has high quality local fruits and veg plus a wide selection of jellies, cheeses, pies and other tempting treats. Pick up lunch at On the Side BBQ, also in the building – in addition to take-home barbecue, there are lunch specials Monday-Friday. Say hello to the resident golden retrievers while you're there! www.cashiersfarmersmarket.com.

..... Dames Recommend

A Barge Cruise in Southern France

by Cathy Sloss Jones

My husband and I traveled this past spring on the Barge Enchanté with a group of close friends, moving along the Canal du Midi located in Languedoc in the Occitanie region of Southern France. It is a forgotten coast with few tourists and incredible beauty.

The weather was unseasonably cool, which made al fresco dining and relaxation difficult. Nevertheless, it was an amazing trip and a great way to explore the region for anyone who loves food and wine.

The boat's chef, Mateo, is Venezuelan and had chosen this quieter assignment after recently working in a Michelin-star restaurant in Munich, Germany. The boat's galley was centered in the main salon so we were constantly entertained by Mateo's preparation of our food. And of course, it was always fabulous!

In addition to multi-course meals, there were always delicious French wines and local cheeses with each sitting.

A highlight of the trip was shopping with Mateo in the local markets. Our favorite was the farmers' market in Narbonne. Mateo's enthusiasm for food made us all feel like small children, as we tagged along behind him as he conversed with the different vendors.

All this was great inspiration for our fabulous Market at Pepper Place back in Birmingham. The photos can describe much better than I the wonder of this experience. Highly recommend!



Above: One of the highlights of the trip was shopping in the local markets. At right: The boat's chef, Mateo, prepared multi-course meals that were always amazing.



Saying “Yes” to a Wedding in France

by Leigh Sloss-Corra

When old friends from Paris sent a save-the-date last fall for their daughter’s wedding to be held the following July in the French countryside, I immediately replied “yes, we will attend.” I knew it would be worth it. And I was right.

Early July seemed like a terrible time to be in France. “Covid-revenge” travel and a favorable currency exchange rate meant record numbers of tourists were flooding the country. There were riots and strikes reported in Paris. Heat waves were scorching small towns, not known for air conditioning. In the end, it was the perfect time to go, and better than I ever imagined.

The wedding was July 8th, so we spent a few perfect days in Paris before heading south to the Loire et Cher region where everything would be happening. Pro tip: If you’re visiting Paris during peak tourist season, skip the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower. Instead we visited the brand new Musée de la Marine, Picasso Museum, and Jardins du Luxembourg, which were gloriously quiet and breathtakingly beautiful.

Breakfast at the Les Deux Magots was a pleasure because we went early. Because it stays light outside until 10 or 11 p.m. at night in summer, so many people prefer to dine much later than Americans. That suited us fine as we were finishing up our evenings just around the time everyone else was heading out.

On Friday, we traveled by train to Orleans, an hour south of Paris, and rented a car from there. We were supposed to sleep at the



A perfect petit déjeuner at Les Deux Magots with cappuccino, toasted baguette, fresh butter, and homemade strawberry jam.

home of my friends’ “neighbors” but didn’t have an address, phone number, or expected time of arrival. Eventually we received a cryptic text with the names of our hosts and of their chateau. We arrived at a magical spot that was beyond expectations. Our hosts were gracious and entertaining. Drinks and a casual dinner in the garden were a dream.

The next day was the wedding. We dressed up and made our way to the estate of my friends. It was hot, and A/C was nowhere to be found. The ceremony was held outside next to a lake—heartfelt, humorous, and relaxed in the best of ways. The reception and “lunch” afterward lasted all afternoon, with champagne, oysters, an endless variety of small bites, incredible music, and touching speeches. At 5 p.m., it could all have ended and

been perfect, but instead, everyone went home for a rest before the “dinner party” would begin.

The evening celebration kicked off at 8 p.m. with Champagne, cocktails, and passed appetizers in another part of the expansive property. There was a band playing Motown classics—impossible not to dance to.

Eventually people took their seats while a magnificent supper was served family-style, with huge grilled steaks on cutting boards placed every few spots so guests could choose their own portions and doneness. Champagne, wine, and conversation in multiple languages flowed. In between courses, everyone danced—the band was so good! There were a few speeches, and then it was time for dessert! A brigade of servers paraded around the tables carrying giant sparklers and trays full of various sweets.



Everyone cheered, and I believe it was better than any 4th of July celebration.

After dessert, there was more conversation and dancing. A late-night band and DJ took the place of the Motown crew. Midnight sustenance came in the form of freshly made crepes and a cocktail bar. By 1:30 a.m. we were ready for bed, so we returned to our spectacular chateau. Most of the others stayed up and partied until dawn.

The next morning, we enjoyed coffee in the chateau front garden, then returned to the our friends’ home for brunch at noon. No one was visibly exhausted or hung-over as we had expected, rather they were mostly impeccably dressed, chatting, and enjoying the day. It was hot and no one seemed to mind. The food was beautiful and tasty, and everyone partook.

By 4 p.m., out-of-towners had left and guests staying until Monday, including the bride and groom—and us—thankfully, retired to the

Above: The incredible Château de Moleon, where Leigh stayed with neighbors of the bride’s family. At right: A beautiful gâteau aux fruits that was served at the wedding.



swimming pool. Dinner that night was paella and salad, with desserts left over from the night before. Best of all for us, the parents of the bride invited us to stay the rest of the week, which we did. And it was glorious, taking day trips to visit cathedrals and chateaux, then returning to dine with friends in a spot that was even

lovelier than what we’d just seen—and had a pool!

Not all destination weddings are as amazing. But, we’ve found that many are unforgettable enough to take a chance. The next time you’re invited, I encourage you to say “yes” too. You might also end up in an chateau, surrounded by a moat, and it might even have A/C.

Let's Toast

Christiana Roussel was honored at the 2023 Alabama Press Association Media Awards. In the Best Column category she won 1st place for her article in *Vestavia Hills Magazine*, "Classic Crescent City." Her article "Chattanooga Like a Local" won 2nd place in the same category. The later article in *Vestavia Hills Magazine* also placed 3rd in the Best Travel Feature category.



and industry. Its primary mission is to promote the education of all culinarians by mentoring, awarding scholarships to students seeking a future in the culinary industry, providing grants to professionals to further their career.

Brooke Bell has been promoted to Executive Vice President/Chief Content Officer of Hoffman Media. Hoffman Media, LLC is a privately held, leading special-interest publisher based in Birmingham.



Chef Susan Notter, CEPC was inducted into the American Academy of Chefs at the National Convention, July 18, 2023. The honor society of ACF, the American Academy of Chefs [AAC] represents the highest standards of professionalism in the organization, society,



Kristen Farmer Hall and her partner Victor King are relocating and trading spaces with The Essential and Bar La Fête. Kristen says The Essential



needed more room to expand the dining room and a larger kitchen, which the First Avenue North location of Bar La Fête provided. The Morris Avenue location will give the bar a more quaint, quirky feel, according to Kristen.

In Remembrance

Former Dame **Phyllis Hoffman DePiano** passed away on July 10, 2023, surrounded by her family. Phyllis founded her publishing company in 1983 and it became known as Hoffman Media in 1998. She was a successful, creative entrepreneur, well-known in the media world. She always celebrated life's "beauty" and shared it with others. She cherished her family and friends...and they always came first.

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HEY Y'ALL!





The Robinsons are going on an adventure.
We're moving to Maine,
Connor is going to Ole Miss,
& Sprouhouse is expanding into New England.
COME VISIT!

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Dame Melany Robinson has moved to Portland, Maine. Please see her moving card above for the best ways to stay in touch with her.