



Les Dames d'Escoffier
INTERNATIONAL



Founded in 2013

Ideibirmingham.org

Spring 2019

President's Note

I was talking about our Birmingham chapter the other day, explaining who we are and what we do, when I said: "I have never been a part of an organization where each member works so hard and so selflessly toward a common goal. Not ever! And I've served on a number of nonprofit and school boards and even in city government."

The level of commitment and camaraderie I witnessed with last year's Southern Soiree, in particular, was amazing. And inspiring. And exciting. I was thrilled when Kathy G. Mezrano and Kay Reed agreed to co-chair this event again, bringing their expertise and what they learned from last year back to make the event better than ever. When Barbara Kenyon asked to help them, we all were thrilled.

I'm seeing the same kind of commitment and excitement with the scholarship committee, headed by Rosemary Dallam. She has a huge committee of volunteers, and this group is off and running! The applications are already available on our website thanks to Rachel West. This year, we more than doubled our awards

continued on page 2, see Letter

Planning for Southern Soirée has begun!



The fundraising committee has already started making plans for this year's Southern Soirée. See the article on page 7 for all the details, including information about the event's new location this year at the Barn at Shady Lane shown above and at right.



with \$25,000 to share—thanks to the success of Southern Soiree!

I'm seeing incredible dedication to a greater good in our community with Cheryl Slocum, who agreed to head outreach and indeed define that committee and make it happen. This is how we will fulfill our commitment to mentoring. It's been part of our mission since the beginning; now it's going to become a working reality with some of the women growers and makers from Pepper Place Market. Kate Nicholson volunteered to help Cheryl navigate this and make it happen. I have every confidence in these two women, and I am proud of them for stepping up. If they contact you to share your expertise—communications, branding, product development, etc.—with our mentees, please consider saying yes.

Ashley McMakin and Sidney Fry are back again to handle our social media, which is increasingly important. They work hard at this, but somehow they make it look easy. I know it's not, and I am so grateful for their knowledge, skills, and effort.

Christiana Roussel and her programs committee have put together events that entertain and inform. I was on a conference call recently with presidents of other chapters, and I was reminded all over again

that our programs are always smart and fun and well worth your time.

Leigh Sloss-Corra will begin meeting with the membership committee soon to identify, contact, and vet potential new members. Know that we need input far beyond this committee; it's up to all of us to help identify new members. Think about whom you would like to see here. This is, of course, vitally important to the future of our chapter.

And together Martha Johnston and Rachel West create what I truly believe is the best chapter newsletter in the entire LDEI worldwide organization. Thank you to all the Dames who graciously step up to write the articles Rachel and Martha assign. We will begin sharing this newsletter more widely with the public because not only does it inform our membership about what's going on, it also offers features that are of interest to anyone who loves food and our food traditions and local food community.

By now you all have your committee assignments. If you haven't been contacted yet about what you can do, you will be soon. And if there's something in particular you want to do, let me know and we can work to make that happen.

It's not too soon to think about how you can help make Southern Soirée a success. (Look to that article on page 7 for specific ideas.) We also will be asking for Dames to do

chef demos at Pepper Place. And I'd like to expand that to other kinds of Dame-led demos—table decorating, how to host a tailgate party, crafts with market items; the possibilities are endless. Not everyone cooks, but we all do something special. And each time we, as Dames, share our talents, we increase our reach and influence and reputation in the community.

That reminds me of something that happened last year during our now-annual Takeover of Pepper Place Market. When asked, Brittany Garrigus agreed to do a chef demo. She was hesitant at first to volunteer because she was new to the organization, and she said she didn't want to overstep. I told her that she's a member just like any of us. All possibilities and opportunities are open to her. And, of course, she knocked it out of the park with her lovely personality and delicious homemade pear jam!

Here's the thing: All members are equal here. Whether you are a founding member or a member of our 2018 class, you are a Dame. And a Dame is a Dame is a Dame. You had what it takes to become a member—the years, the experience, the talent, the business sense, the recommendations of your peers—but it's up to you to make this organization your own.

All the best!
Susan Swagler

Financial Literacy Program: Challenges Women Face in the 21st Century

By Martha Johnston

A panel of three financial experts met with Birmingham Dames and their guests on January 28, 2019, to discuss the merits of comprehensive financial planning. Those participating on the panel were: Aimee L. Burgess, CPA, with Warren Averett Women's Wealth Connection; Aimee W. Barnes, financial advisor with Bluestein-Eggers Wealth Management Group/Merrill Lynch; and Julie D. Helmers, vice president, Lathrop Helmers & Associates/Merrill Lynch. Christiana Roussel moderated the presentation.

The panel covered a range of financial management topics, sharing their advice, including:

- Review your will, living will, and Power of Attorney designee at least every five years and update if needed.
- When searching for a financial advisor, interview as many as necessary to find someone who meets your needs. If an advisor doesn't have time for a 30-minute interview, you should pass.
- Consider how your work history, children, and parents will affect your ability to save for retirement.
- Always maintain a six month emergency fund.
- If your employer offers a company-sponsored 401k retirement account with a matching amount, max out your contributions to receive all of those matching funds.
- If you max out your retirement account (401K, IRA, and/or Roth IRA), then talk to a financial planner, and consider opening an investment account or buying property.
- A business succession plan is a necessity whether you are planning to sell or keep your business in the family long term.
- Do a business valuation regularly whether you are planning to sell the company or not.
- In restaurant business, men historically pay themselves more than female owners.
- Women restaurant owners should "pay themselves" on same scale as men or they will lose when it comes to selling the company or applying for financial assistance.
- Prepare for the unexpected: divorce or widowhood.
- 56 is the average age when a woman becomes a widow.
- 50% of all first marriages end in divorce.
- 60% of all second marriages end in divorce.
- Get your personal finances in order if you see signs of trouble ahead in a marriage.



The first program of 2019 was an insightful talk about about range of financial planning and management issues affecting women.

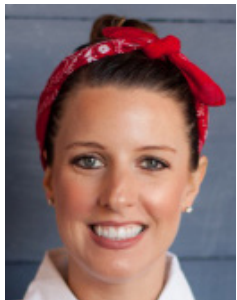
- If you're married or in a partnership, always pay attention to your tax returns and be aware of and involved in all financial accounts.
- Keep business and personal expenses separate. If you use your phone for business and personal expenses, allocate a percentage of use to your business. Just be reasonable.
- Teach your children about money management via cash and checking account. Encourage them to budget using allowance or earnings for spending, savings, and donations. This builds personal financial and social responsibility.
- Women need disability insurance.
- Defer taking Social Security until you are 70 if possible.
- Prepare for your death: Provide survivors an immediate "to do" list, leave clear funeral directions, and provide a list of passwords and location of important papers.

Meet Our New Members!

Our chapter gained nine new members in August 2018. Here, get to know the last five of these extraordinary women a little better. The other four were featured in the Winter 2018 newsletter.

Geri-Martha O'Hara

Place of birth: Cullman, AL. My father's family is from Blountsville, AL. My mother's side is from Germany and California. My maternal grandparents met in Germany during WWII!
College/professional school(s) attended, major, degree earned: Entrepreneurship, small business management, University of Alabama
Current position: co-owner Big Spoon Creamery
How did you get your start? Started at the bottom, working at Olexa's in the kitchen. I jumped right into Birmingham kitchens. Working two jobs at one time even! I never went to culinary school; I taught myself and learned from *Cook's Illustrated*. I became a pastry chef in 2009. I honed in on my skill, by interning at Jean-George's in New York City for three months,

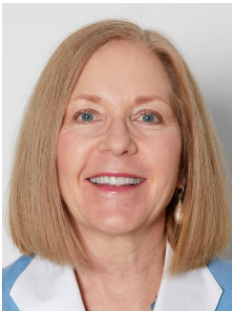


followed by a week at Le Bernardin. This special would really define the rest of my career as a pastry chef. I returned to Birmingham and quickly after joined the pastry team at Bottega. The rest is history! I was there for around five years. Really getting a taste of all the wonderful pastries there are to make. It was there I realized my love for making ice cream, sauces, and cookies. I met my husband, Ryan, working at Bottega. Pardis actually helped with the marriage proposal. We started Big Spoon three months after we got married. We started it as a pop-up in our driveway with \$500. It was a huge success and we actually had *Southern Living* write an online article about our pop-up that day. We gained Birmingham's attention quickly. We have grown organically

as a company, from our driveway to a storefront in 3 years, now two storefront in 5 years in April!
What do you enjoy about your current position? MY TEAM! We have the most incredible group of people that work at Big Spoon. Ryan and I are passionate about providing a positive, thriving work environment for our team. We love seeing our team grow as leaders. We're most passionate about developing young leaders!
What does success look like to you? Success looks like a family enjoying ice cream on a Sunday, spending quality time together, and making memories.
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 Germany and meet my extended family, and learn to cook the family recipes! My great great great grandmother was a German baker!

Kate Nicholson

Place of birth: Shreveport, LA
College/professional school(s) attended, major, degree earned: Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA – Bachelor of Science Institute of Paralegal Training, Philadelphia, PA – Real Estate
Current position: Recipe editor, Meredith Corporation
How did you get your start? In the culinary world, I started as a part-time recipe editor for



Southern Living magazine.
What do you enjoy about your current position? I love interacting with the test kitchen chefs to ensure accuracy of published recipes.
What does success look like to you? To enjoy each day as I make a real contribution to the various brands I edit for.

If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? Lump Crabmeat Cocktail, Filet Mignon, Spinach Madeleine, Soufflé Potatoes, Chocolate Mousse
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? I'd take a river cruise from Paris to Prague.
Bonus! My mother was the food editor of the *Shreveport Times* for over 30 years.

Rebecca Williamson

Place of birth: Chattanooga, TN
College/professional school(s) attended, major, degree earned: BA from Auburn University and a culinary degree from Le Cordon Bleu in London England
Current position: Owner and creator of Holmsted Fine Foods
How did you get your start? I started making a beloved recipe of Green Tomato Chutney that



blossomed into a line of four chutneys.
What do you enjoy about your current position? Meeting people in various ownership roles learning more about the food business and of course getting to be creative.
What does success look like to you? When chutney becomes a household item and is used frequently across the U.S.

If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? Homemade bread and cheese with chutney.
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? I would go visit a field office for International Justice Mission to see their work up close. Holmsted Fines is committed to giving back and IJM.
Bonus! I have dyslexia and I have to work twice as hard as most people but I refuse to allow it to stop or hinder my career.

Rebel Negley

Place of birth: Birmingham, AL, East End Memorial Hospital
College/professional school(s) attended, major, degree earned: Attended UAB with courses toward a BS in Social Work. Hold an active license as a real estate broker in the state of Alabama. Attended Auburn University certificate program for economic development
Current position: Recently formed a new company, Redemption Kitchens, and am managing partner. We work as a food broker, encouraging our clients to be second-chance employers for women who are recently out of drug rehabs and are convicted felons.
How did you get your start? I managed a large food manufacturing facility in Fort Payne, Alabama (Granny Hester's Fine Foods) then moved on to other food-related ventures including



the management of a second-chance bakery (Color Code Cookies) where I was a finalist for the 2018 Imerge Social Entrepreneur of the year. Then, I formed Redemption Kitchens in late 2018.
What do you enjoy about your current position? I love using my experience in food to translate to a social cause and help women who otherwise have very little opportunity to achieve full time steady employment.
What does success look like to you? Watching the women grow in self confidence when they achieve goals and dreams they had given up on completely.
If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? I should probably say something

very sophisticated here. However, it wouldn't reflect my true expectations. My favorite savory dish is a creamy mac 'n cheese. Sweet would be dark chocolate lava cake or an old-fashioned yellow layer cake with chocolate icing. Pretty simple.
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? Italy! I've never been. It's on my bucket list.
Bonus! I have been a large animal vet tech, a farmer, and previously certified in heating, air conditioning, and electrical. I do the majority of my home repairs. My daughter and I are in the process of opening a new business, Porch Goat Farms. We will be bringing goats to the city for yoga classes, birthday parties, and farm demonstrations (coming soon spring 2019). Very excited about this!

Rosie Pihakis

Place of birth: Rome, Italy
College/professional school(s) attended, major, degree earned: University of Alabama, BS English/Business Management.
Current position: Table 52 Hospitality, owner; Pihakis Restaurant Group, partner
How did you get your start? I started at Jim ‘N Nick’s Bar-B-Q as a local store marketer in 2011. My role gradually evolved to take on additional responsibilities in the marketing department, to eventually managing all market-



ing initiatives company-wide. I left in April 2017 thankful, having learned a tremendous amount about the industry over

the past eight years.
What do you enjoy about your current position? I love making connections with likeminded individuals in the restaurant industry who deeply care about food. Whether they are chefs, operators, writers, etc., I love people who have a passion for food.

What does success look like to you? Making a difference in the lives of others. Feeling like I’ve contributed something to the world at the end of the day. I think for me that boils down to one word: happiness.
If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? It depends on my mood. Currently, Rodney Scott’s BBQ Chicken Wings.
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? I would go skiing in Colorado. And scope out some well-known local restaurants while I’m there!

Celebrating the Season: Holiday Open House

President Susan Swagler hosted a Holiday Open House on Sunday, December 16 for Birmingham Dames. Members celebrated our chapter’s fifth year anniversary and 2018 accomplishments and toasted to a fantastic 2019.



2019 LDEI Birmingham fundraiser update: A New Year, a New Location

By Susan Swagler

Plans already are in place, and volunteers are lining up for our next Southern Soirée in the fall. Kathy G. Mezrano and Kay Reed will co-chair this event again this year, and Barbara Kenyon will be working closely with both of them. This is a stellar leadership team!

Last year’s event was nothing short of amazing. We put together a truly magical evening with incredible food, drinks, and entertainment. The setting was absolutely beautiful, and the way we celebrated and honored our scholarship and grant recipients was much appreciated. We made a lot of new friends in the community, and, best of all, we made enough money to more than double our outreach efforts!

We will be awarding \$25,000 in scholarships and grants this year to women of all ages.

People already are asking about our next Soiree! Actually, they started asking about it the very week after the last one! Because Jones Valley Teaching Farm will be renovating on our chosen date (Sunday, October 13), we will be changing our venue.

We are thrilled that The Barn at Shady Lane will be home to our event. If you aren’t familiar with it, take a minute to look online at <https://thebarnatshadylane.com>. The ambiance will certainly work with our established sophisticated, yet casual, style. Please email Kathy G. Mezrano, Kay Reed, and Susan Swagler with any ideas you have to



Thanks to last year’s successful Southern Soirée fundraiser, we more than doubled our scholarship fund—we will be awarding \$25,000 in scholarships, awards, and grants in 2019. This year’s event will be held at the Barn at Shady Lane—the interior is shown above.

make the fundraiser our best yet.

All of the Dames who served on last year’s Soiree committee will be working on this event again—bringing expertise to their roles and enthusiasm to our fundraising efforts.

Everyone needs to join them in some way or another.

This is, as you all know, our main fundraiser. This is how we fund the future of food in Birmingham and, indeed, in our state. So it is imperative that everyone—each and every member—contributes to making Southern Soirée successful. This means ticket sales. This means asking people for sponsorships. This means securing donations of products and services. This means working the event. This means taking ownership of our fundraiser however you can do so. Maybe you donate a Dame-led experience

for our silent auction. Maybe you work that auction. Maybe you are the first face our guests see at the ticket tables. Maybe you make food for the event. Maybe you put out that food or serve drinks. Maybe you work alongside our awesome student volunteers to set up, or maybe you stay late to help break it all down. There really are so many ways to pitch in!

Look for more details about Southern Soirée in the next newsletter and in email updates. Meanwhile, please give careful consideration to how you can contribute your own talents and time to make this event as successful as possible.

Our 2019 fundraiser hashtags
#LDEIBHMsoiree2019
#howwefundthefuture

Mardi Gras: A Tale of Two Cities

By Leigh Sloss-Corra & Anne Cain

While New Orleans may be more famous for Mardi Gras (or Fat Tuesday), Mobile, Alabama actually boasts the oldest annual celebration which was observed in 1703 when Mobile was the capital of Louisiana.

In New Orleans, Mardi Gras street processions had become an annual tradition by the 1730s and the first official Mardi Gras parade with floats was held February 24, 1856 by the Krewe of Comus. In both Mobile and New Orleans, Mardi Gras is a season rather than a single day and is celebrated with parties, balls, and parades beginning as early as November in Mobile and continuing through Ash Wednesday eve, which this year is March 5th. The largest and most elaborate parades are held in the last 5 days of the season.

In New Orleans, krewes are the organizations responsible for planning and executing Mardi Gras parades and masquerade balls. Many krewes don't reveal the theme of their parades until the night of the event. Some make sure their participants' identities are never publicized (which is why they wear elaborate masks during parades.)

In Mobile, the Mardi Gras organizations, called mystic societies, start the season in November, with exclusive parties held by some secret mystic societies, and follow with New Year's Eve balls. It has become closely entwined with the social debutante season for certain families. During the last two weeks before Mardi Gras, at least one major parade takes place each day in the city. There are 38 parades over the two-week period leading up to



Costumes for members of the Rex Organization, one of the oldest and most prestigious Mardi Gras krewes in New Orleans.

Ash Wednesday. One of the notable parades in Mobile is the Joe Cain Parade on the Sunday before Fat Tuesday. Cain was a Confederate veteran credited with relaunching Mardi Gras in Mobile after the Civil War. He would dress as a fictional Chickasaw Indian chief who stood up to Union forces. Each year, a local man portraying Cain leads the procession, known as the “people’s parade.” A group of women dress up as the “merry widows of Joe Cain” who show up at his grave claiming to be his wife.

“Throw Me Something, Mister?” Members of the krewes or mystic societies, often masked, on floats or horseback, toss throws to the parade goers, who try to catch them and to take home as souvenirs. Throws include necklaces of plastic

beads, doubloon coins, decorated plastic cups, candy, snacks, stuffed animals, small toys, footballs, frisbees, or whistles. In Mobile, Moon Pies are the most popular throws. Mystic societies once threw boxes of Cracker Jacks to revelers, but boxes sailing through the air from a parade float proved to be bit too dangerous. Moon Pies are yummy, Southern, and relatively safe.

Fun Facts about New Orleans Mardi Gras

- 1.4 million visitors each year, generating \$1B in economic impact annually
- New Orleans’s Mardi Gras organizations are called krewes.
- There are over 75 krewes
- Purple, gold, and green are the official colors of Mardi Gras, rep-



Floats are lined up in the barn pre-parade for riders to load their throws and beads. There are usually Bloody Marys involved.

resenting justice, faith, and power. These were established by the Rex Organization, one of the oldest krewes in New Orleans, in 1892.

- The Mardi Gras regalia of the court—gown, collar, mantle—can weigh up to 100 pounds! The published cost of a queen’s custom-made gown in 2012 was \$6,000-\$12,000 but it’s said that a queen’s gown nowadays can cost up to \$20,000.

Top Mardi Gras Foods in New Orleans

A few top foods you’ll probably consume in New Orleans during Mardi Gras include: King Cake, Danish dough pastry sprinkled with sugar in the three colors of Mardi Gras and containing a plastic toy baby; classics like gumbo,

shrimp creole and crawfish étouffée; for lunch, shrimp and oyster po-boys and mufulettas; and for anytime of day or night, drinks like Sazeracs and milk punch. Milk punch is the perfect drink to start the day—it’s made with milk (and bourbon or rum), and keeps your alcohol blood level sustained for the Mardi Gras boozy long haul.

Fun Facts about Mobile Mardi Gras

- 38 parades
- Mobile’s Mardi Gras organizations are called mystic societies.
- Over 40 mystic societies
- \$5,000- \$25,000 for a gown if you are the queen or in the court
- 3 million Moon Pies are tossed each year

- Mobile’s Mardi Gras flag is different from the New Orleans flag in that it features only purple and gold colors. The purple stands for justice and the gold for power.

Top Mardi Gras Foods in Mobile

A few top foods you’ll probably consume in Mobile during Mardi Gras include: Bloody Marys and mimosas to start the day; boiled peanuts; beer; bourbon or your mixed drink of choice; king cake; Dew Drop Inn hot dogs; Moon Pies; Foosacklys; cheese straws; homemade chicken, potato, and/or pasta salad; baked goods from Pollman’s Bakery.

See page 15 for Anne Cain’s restaurant recommendations for Mardi Gras in Mobile.

My Mardi Gras Experience
(*Dame Leigh Sloss-Corra had the opportunity to go Mardi Gras in New Orleans last year and is graciously sharing the experience.*)

2018 was the 300th birthday of the City of New Orleans so Mardi Gras was expected to be exceptionally festive and grand. Our New Orleans cousin, Lynes (Poco) Sloss, a member of the Rex Organization, one of the oldest and most prestigious krewes in New Orleans, had been chosen to be King of Carnival in 2018.

The King must be an active krewe member and a top civic leader, making Poco a natural choice. Immediately my two sisters (one of whom is Dame Cathy Sloss Jones), husbands, and several friends made plans to attend Mardi Gras for this once-in-a-lifetime experience. It was an unforgettable four days, with every meal, outfit, and accessory orchestrated to maximize the pomp and ceremony. Of course we had hardly a moment without beautiful food, refreshing drinks, and sparkling company.

After checking into our French Quarter hotel Saturday afternoon, we dressed up and set out for our first event, a seated dinner for 30 close friends and family, hosted by the King of Carnival (Poco) and his fabulous wife, Liz, at Gautreaux's, a James Beard-nominated restaurant popular with New Orleans insiders. At the dinner we were presented with the official Rex pins for 2018, which we were instructed to wear on dresses or lapels at every event that week. We toasted and proclaimed the official greeting we'd make when in the presence of the king: "Hail Rex!"

Sunday morning, we met up at the Rex Den, the warehouse where all the Rex floats are stored. Think-



Dame Cathy Sloss Jones at the Rex Den, where all the krewe's floats are stored.

ing it would be casual with just friends and family, we were surprised to find huge crowds arriving, with people of all ages quite elegantly dressed. Inside, a top-notch Dixieland jazz combo played. Slices of king cake and milk punch were served on silver trays as more fancy folks streamed in, chatting and checking out the scene. The party had begun. There were other beverage options at various bar stations—Bloody Marys and mimosas—but sadly no coffee. After a few milk punches, we revived and checked out the floats and costumes being prepped for Tuesday's parade.

Rex hosts one of the fanciest and most anticipated parades of the season with about 30 elaborate floats. Further inside the Den, we explored the "Rex Mart," selling the 2018 Rex memorabilia—beautifully designed and fine quality jewelry, posters, t-shirts, silk scarves, and more.

In one of the inner rooms, we found the King's Room, where Rex gets dressed the morning of the parade. It was like a museum, with framed photos, gowns, and costumes from former kings and

queens, and other historical artifacts. The 2018 Queen of Rex arrived, a stylish blonde UVA junior, and was interviewed by select members of the press. The 2018 King arrived—our cousin—and the crowd went wild. He gave a speech, posed for a few photos, and then he and his family were whisked off like heads of state in a cavalcade of black limos to another event. We (the guests) strolled a few blocks to the fabulous home of notable Rex friends where we spent the afternoon over brunch (and drinks of course) relaxing and coordinating plans. We watched several parades roll by on our way back to the hotel, enjoyed a light supper at Angeline, a gorgeous spot the French Quarter, and ubered back to our beds close to midnight.

From then on, the food and festivities never stopped. Monday began with the annual Proteus luncheon at Antoine's. It's impossible to top the atmosphere, elegance, music, and excitement of this iconic restaurant. There were Parades in the street and music everywhere. All had orchestrated outfits from hats to heels.



Above: King Rex in all his splendor. Above right: Dames Leigh Sloss-Corra and Cathy Sloss Jones at the ball. Right: The Queen of Rex in all her finery.

After the luncheon, we all met at the Public Belt Railroad and travelled in an elegantly outfitted train car with all the Rex insiders, including the King and his young Queen, to the ceremonial meeting with the King of Zulu (another krewe). There were formal speeches, news crews, giant crowds, and libations flowing. My cousin, King of Carnival, was a natural on stage, charming, well-spoken, and quite stately—a model for other leaders to emulate. We were awestruck by the spectacle and very proud.

Fat Tuesday was non-stop pomp and splendor. We attended the Queen's luncheon, at the Inter-Continental Hotel, with its very strict dress code: men in morning suits and women in Chanel-style tweed suits with gloves, hats, matching handbags, and shoes. The Queen's court were presented in a grand parade. Each "maid," adorned in a color-coordinated ensemble, was accompanied by a dashing escort. Speeches and another fabulous meal were enjoyed while Zulu's parade "rolled" down St. Charles Avenue outside.

When the Rex floats finally approached, we all gathered on a posh private viewing balcony and watched the floats pass from the comfort of our seats. When the king's float arrived in front of our balcony, our cousin, the king of Rex, came close to the balcony and saluted the queen, made a witty speech about how lovely she was, etc. She returned the praise. The crowds cheered, beads were thrown, and the parade rolled on. We made our way home to rest before the big night.

The Rex Ball that evening was beyond splendid. Men were in white tie, women in floor-length gowns *Vogue* would die to feature. These were the beautiful people of New Orleans, with a few celebrities mixed in: Bryan Batt, Walter Isaacson, James Carville, and Mary Matalin were in their element. Long white gloves were required for the ladies, short white cotton gloves for the men. Champagne was the drink of choice, bien sur. The King and Queen were introduced to the audience in a ritualized presentation. The U.S. Marine Corps Band performed stirring tunes. We then all processed



out of the ballroom and across the street on a red carpet to the Comus Ball, where the royal courts of Rex and Comus met in another ritualized presentation. Afterward, we all returned to the Rex Ballroom for dancing and a midnight supper. Believe it or not, we were starving and ready to eat—and drink again! Scrambled eggs, bacon, and a fluffy biscuit never tasted so good.

Wednesday was a blur. Heads and feet sore. suitcases packed, beads put away, we returned to our drab lives in Birmingham. Royalty no more. Back to the real world.

Women Growing the Future: A Report from SSAWG

By Leigh Sloss-Corra

The last weekend in January, over 1,000 farmers, food producers, chefs, and food policy makers gathered in Little Rock, Arkansas for SSAWG 2018, the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group’s Annual Conference.

The four-day conference offered attendees top speakers, field trips to farms and food hubs, smaller sessions on a variety of topics, networking meet-ups, and parties. The conclusion of the conference was one of optimism: The future of farming is more hopeful because it’s more diverse and being led by more women.

The mission of SSAWG, founded almost three decades ago, is stated: “to empower and inspire farmers, individuals, and communities in the South to create an agricultural system that is ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just, and humane, without bias.” As sustainability has gained more attention in our current society, older “alternative” farmers and food producers are being joined by a growing, younger demographic, and many of them are women. Women are tilling fields, starting up CSAs, teaching kids to garden, and working with chefs to get more fresh food on their menus.

I am the female director of a farmers’ market that encourages sustainable farming practices, so I found the conference exciting and inspiring. Historically, farming was considered a man’s job; now men and women manage farms side by side. Some farms are managed exclusively by women. African-Americans and Latinos too were often simply workers. Now

clearly, they are leaders as well, teaching others how farming and food production offer a path to personal growth, financial independence, and social change.

Favorite sessions, all of which were led by women, highlighted a wide variety of topics: the business of growing cut flowers, how social media can make your farm more successful, the future of farmers’ markets, the future of farmed hemp, growing for restaurants, growing for schools, finding your voice in policy, funding your mission, and upping your record-keeping game. It was a brain-filling long weekend!

In between sessions and in the evenings, conference attendees were encouraged to sample a wide array of nearby restaurants that source from local farmers. Many are women-run. There are also 10 craft breweries and a distillery in Little Rock, so we had plenty of refreshments to try; all were reasonably priced. My group and I had incredible salads at a lunch spot called The Corner—unique combinations with yummy ingredients (pork belly perfectly grilled—yum!). I’d eat there every day if I could. A few blocks away, with about two dozen different food

stalls, the River Market Food Hall served up international dishes, as tasty as any in New York or L.A. A longer walk one chilly night led us to The Root Café, a kind of alt-hippie restaurant that only sources locally. It was packed with folks, affordable and again every dish was delicious. Definitely worth the extra steps to get there.

Our last night, we grabbed dinner in the bar of the Capital Hotel, a classically designed and perfectly restored pre-Civil War building that President Ulysses Grant famously visited in the 1870s, bringing his horse up to his room in the elevator, because it was so large. The bar/restaurant was elegantly appointed, full of people, eating, drinking, and talking up a storm. The menu’s mix of options were just what we wanted, and the wines rich and satisfying. At 10 o’clock, just as things were quieting down, the bar was suddenly filled with folks in fancy dress, coming for a nightcap and a snack after the Symphony. A trumpet player (from the orchestra?) joined the jazz combo in the lobby and they knocked out a few lush tunes. Little Rock was a surprisingly diverse, clean, and architecturally beautiful city. We missed the Clinton Presidential Library during our stay because of the Federal Government Shutdown, and the cold temperatures made it hard to linger on the many walking trails along the river. So I think we’ll go back to one day soon. It may, however, be just as much for the restaurants, and the pork belly....



Above: The restored Capital Hotel has an elegantly appointed bar/restaurant that hosted a jazz combo in the lobby in the evening (left).

Update: Scholarship, Awards, and Outreach

By Rosemary Dallam

Following the December 2018 meeting of the Scholarship, Awards, and Outreach Committee at OvenBird, a request for \$25,000 for 2019 scholarships and awards was presented to the LDEI Birmingham Board. The Board unanimously approved the amount for scholarships, teacher grants, the entrepreneur award, and the non-profit organization award.

All of the applications for these scholarships and awards are updated and accessible from our Birmingham LDEI website under the scholarship tab. The committee asks each Dame to review the criteria and encourage all eligible women to apply for these scholarships and awards. The deadline is March 15, 2019.

A new awards ceremony is being planned by this group and the Program Committee. It is tentatively set for April 25, 2019. This event will be open to the public and offer long-term sponsorship opportunities.

All community colleges and universities in the state offering programs in our scope of practice

were provided with the scholarship application process. Plans have been made to visit several university hospitality and restaurant management classes to market the scholarships. To increase our outreach, Dames plan to assist with judging at the State High School Culinary Arts Competition in Huntsville on March 4, 2019.

The Outreach Committee, led by Cheryl Slocum and Kate Nicholson, has established a goal to mentor 10 new entrepreneurs. The group will be contacting many of last year’s applicants for the entrepreneur award as well as women participating in the Market at Pepper Place to see if they are interested in Dames advising them on any professional business needs.

Scholarship and Award Applications
Due March 15, 2019

Awards Ceremony
April 25, 2019
(tentative)

Events Calendar

Monday, Feb. 25	6:30 p.m. John Hand Club	Annual Favorite Things Party, Dames only
Monday, March 4	Huntsville	Judging: High School Culinary Arts Competition
Friday, March 15		Deadline: Scholarships, awards, and grants applications
Thursday, April 25	TBD	LDEI Scholarship & Awards Ceremony

..... Dames Recommend

Portland & Oregon Wine Country

Ashley Tarver

I celebrated my 35th birthday with a trip to Portland and the Oregon wine country. I began my trip with a visit to the stunning Japanese gardens. After a peaceful hike, I stopped for a traditional Japanese tea. Then it was off to the famous Powell's Books. I wandered for hours between the used books, cookbooks, and new releases and left with quite the haul.

Lunch was quiche and a simple green salad at St Honore Bistro in the Nob Hill neighborhood. I enjoyed wandering in and out of herbal tea stores and vintage stores lining every block. Then, I found an eclectic shop in Portland's Central Eastside where the owners travel the world sourcing textiles and knick knacks. I bought an antique Japanese kimono and have a story about it to share in person!

Nostrana, owned by Dame Cathy Whims, was my choice for dinner. Chef Cathy sent out several special plates. Her famous Butterscotch Budino and a glass of cognac were the perfect ending to my dinner.

I chose stay in Portland and take the 45-minute trip daily to visit the wineries. First was Domaine Serene. After a small wine tasting, I headed to the Allison Inn and Spa, which has one of, if not the nicest spas I have ever visited. Oh, and I left with a box of truffles.

Dinner at Bollywood Theatre was the best Indian food I've ever had. Don't let the name fool you! Next was the famous Salt and Straw Ice Cream Parlor. I waited patiently in the line that wrapped around the block. The menu is ever changing. This menu was Halloween themed with ice creams like Creepy



These rolling fields at Bergström Winery have yet to be harvested. Fields like this are practically everywhere you look in Oregon wine country.

Crawler (filled with crickets and mealworms) and Dracula's Blood Pudding (a pig's blood ice cream). While I did sample Creepy Crawler and Dracula's Blood Pudding, I chose a safe yet delicious lavender ice cream.

The next day I visited Stoller Estate. Rolling green hills, picnic tables, and heavy pours set the stage for a lovely afternoon. Dinner was Luc Luc Vietnamese Kitchen in Portland.

The grand finale of my trip was meeting Dame Julianne Kennedy at Ken Wright Estate. I was lucky enough to be there during harvest. And after tasting the fresh pressed juice that Julianne handed me directly from the vat, I felt elated it was so delicious and tried to imagine how it will taste after fermentation. Ken's wife cooked lunch and invited me to join the family meal with the staff. Great fun....Ken Wright is a must see.

Other Portland restaurants of note: Little Bird for the Gruyere Burger, The Jory at The Allison, Apizza Scholls

Other wineries that are a must: Sokol Blosser, Brooks, Soter (requires reservations)

Tip: Drivers to wine country can charge up to \$95 an hour. I found a wonderful driver named Bobbi who was a fraction of the cost and absolutely lovely (971-259-9290).

One of the most interesting things I noted in Portland was the "front of house" set up used in many casual restaurants. Customers get their own silverware, napkins, drink, and go to the bar to order a cocktail. In some, customers go to a certain station to box their own food to go. It certainly was an interesting set up.

While driving the back roads of wine country, I came across a wild mustang farm. We pulled over and I hopped out to take a tour of the farm. I, like most, had a romantic

notion of mustangs running free and wild. However, mustangs are a great problem out west. Mustangs are incredibly fertile and the land cannot support the ever growing population. Mustangs are in great danger, especially of starvation.

The Bureau of Land Management as well as numerous organizations fight to protect and remove mustangs from the wild. It is estimated that 72,000 wild horses are living on land only about to sustain about 27,000 horses. The American Farm Bureau Federation as well as private citizens are fighting to round up the wild mustangs and place them for adoption. Mustangs can be sponsored for as little as \$25 a month or adopted and boarded for as little as \$125.

Above right: Wild mustang farms in Oregon help protect the environment from the effects of overpopulation and the animals from starvation.



Mobile, Alabama for Mardi Gras

Anne Cain

The best places to eat in Mobile for Mardi Gras:

- Noja Fine Dining www.nojmobile.com
- Dauphin's www.godauphins.com
- Osman's Restaurant www.osmans.us
- The Noble South thenoblesouthrestaurant.com
- Dumbwaiter www.dumbwaiterrestaurant.com

- Panini Pete's www.paninipetes.com
- Spot of Tea spotoftea.com

To immerse yourself in Mardi Gras history in Mobile, check out the Mobile Carnival Museum www.mobilecarnivalmuseum.com

For New Orleans Mardi Gras history, dates and times of parades and more, check out <https://www.mardigrasneworleans.com>

..... Let's Toast

Andrea Snyder, founder, owner,

and chief creative officer of RADD Brands has opened a Farm Bowl + Juice Company in Tuscaloosa, AL at the Village at Northbank. It is a juice bar serving Acai bowls, oatmeal bowls, cold pressed juices and smoothies.



Geri-Martha O'Hara has

opened a second location of Big Spoon Creamery in Homewood at 929 Oxmoor Road. She and Ryan O'Hara began selling ice cream in 2014 and opened their first storefront in Avondale in 2017. According to Geri-Martha, the new store offers some fun surprises unique to the Homewood store.



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P.O. Box 43542
Birmingham, Alabama 35243

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Newsletter committee members: Martha Johnston (co-chair), Rachel West (co-chair), Brooke Bell, Leigh Sloss-Corra, Susan Swagler, Ashley Tarver, and Jan Walsh