



Les Dames d'Escoffier
INTERNATIONAL



Founded in 2013

ldeibirmingham.org

Spring 2018

President's Note

Dearest Dames,
Your LDEI board met on January 26, 2018, to review all of our committee reports and to plan for this new year.

One of our first goals is for our group to broaden our philanthropy base through our Outreach and Scholarship Committees. As a result of our successful fundraiser, the board approved a 2018 budget of \$10,000 for distribution to ProStart teachers; students involved in culinary, nutrition and dietetics, hospitality, tourism; and female entrepreneurs in culinary-related fields throughout our state based on criteria the two committees are developing.

Gia McCollister, chair of membership, has sent everyone information regarding our membership schedule for 2018 including orientation, socials, nominations, and interviews. If you have a person in mind, please be aware of the timeline Gia has established so this process can flow as efficiently as intended.

Christiana Roussel, chair of programs, has many fun and interesting plans for us this year so be on the lookout for the calendar that will be posted in our newsletter.

continued on page 2, see Letter

LDEI Birmingham membership nominations are open



The first potential new member social was held to introduce nominees to the Birmingham chapter.

By Martha Johnston

Birmingham Dames gathered for a social on Sunday, February 11, to meet potential member nominees and tell them about the Birmingham chapter of LDEI. The event was a great opportunity to meet women in our area who are focused on philanthropy and supporting other women in the culinary field. According to Gia McCollister, vice president of membership, the official nominating process is now open. The documents required for

you to nominate a new member must be completed and returned to Gia by 5 p.m. on March 5. Remember that it is extremely important to have all the documents required filled out properly and completely. If you have questions, refer to the email Gia sent to the group on Thursday, February 15. Your nominee must be available for an interview on April 3 or 4. The Membership Committee looks forward to your support.

Letter, continued from page 1

ter and sent via email. The luncheon with Elizabeth Heiskell, a regular food contributor on The Today Show, caterer, and cookbook author from Oxford, Mississippi, at Bottega during the holidays got us off to a good start.

Kathy G. Mezrano, chair of fundraising, is going to lead us into another successful event this year. Please stay tuned for future notices for an October event date so you all can be a part of this Champagne and Fried Chicken fundraiser. We anticipate doubling the attendance this year which means raising more money for grants and scholarships and working together to raise the profile of our group!

Jennifer Yarbrough, chair of our website committee, has made a lot of progress but there is still a lot left to do. Her team is working to up-

date our site at present. When all of the other data input completed, our chapter will be able to communicate internally through our website on all matters LDEI BHM.

Ashley McMakin, chair of social media, is working on guidelines and direction for our group so that we will be get broader participation from our membership and be able to attract a larger following.

Leigh Sloss-Corra is working on a proposal for us to have a significant presence at Pepper Place Market during the month of September 2018. This will include food demos. She is exploring the possibility of a table for Dames to sell goods to the market crowd. More details are to come. Try to reserve the Saturdays in September for promoting LDEI to the public.

Birmingham Dames will be participating in the Momentum Leadership Conference on

February 28, 2018, at the Sheraton/BJCC. Cathy Sloss Jones and Leigh Sloss-Corra secured the invitation to introduce LDEI to this group of 800 professional women at the closing reception for the event. Kathy G. Mezrano will take the lead in our presentation and a number of our Dames will offer appetizers and desserts paired with wines as well as introducing Momentum attendees to member cookbooks and products. Other Dames have donated gift certificates for the conference raffle. Becky Satterfield, Angela Schmidt, Kay Reed, Sherron Goldstein, Deborah Stone, Telia Johnson, and Mary Grace Viado will be participating.

It's going to be another productive year for us, and I look forward to seeing all of you!

Yours truly,
Becky

Programs Highlight: Elizabeth Heiskell

By Christiana Roussel

Mid-December brought us a much-needed break from the gray weather and holiday hustle and bustle in the form of lunch with a very special guest. Today Show contributor, caterer, and author of *What Can I Bring?*, Elizabeth Heiskell, joined an intimate group of Birmingham Dames for lunch in advance of her book signing at Amano Gifts. The event came together at the last minute as her PR people in New York hammered out Elizabeth's busy tour schedule.

Space was limited to the first 15 Dames who responded via Venmo (one more incentive to set up your Venmo account, ladies!) and every spot was filled. Dame Pardis Stitt



graciously saved us a spot on the Bottega side of the restaurant where we lost all track of time, enjoying everything from Champagne and crab cakes to chicken paillard and dessert. Dames who brought their *What Can I Bring?* cookbooks were able to have them personalized. Dame Leslie Register shared a copy of her

book, *Leslie's Party Diaries*, with Elizabeth and our group gifted her a Tena Payne bowl from The Cook Store in Mountain Brook Village.

No one wanted the luncheon to come to a close but we reluctantly said good-bye to our new friend and headed back out into the wintry city, full of good holiday cheer.

California Dreaming: A report from the LDEI International Conference in Newport Beach



By Becky Satterfield

The 2017 LDEI Annual Conference in Newport Beach was, true to form, stimulating, inspiring, and fun! As always, I met a lot of amazing Dames that I had never met before and by the last night of the conference, I had more new friends than when I arrived. Co-Chairs, Trina Kaye and Anita Lau, deserve thanks for all of the planning and hard work they did to make our conference so worthwhile.

Dame Sherry Yard, pastry chef extraordinaire, was the conference keynote speaker. She shared an account of her personal history and her recipe for "sweet success." Then CiCi Williamson presented the MFK Fisher Award to Dame Sandra Gutierrez, an amazing writer/chef/person. I had met her in Oxford, Mississippi, in September at the Southern Foodways Alliance Symposium and was happy to hear her speak again. She was the first Latina food editor and columnist of *The Cary News* and spoke on how that lead her to write over 1,000 articles and four cookbooks.

We were reminded to "mentor, mentor, mentor" by Dame Shara Bohach and Becky Paris Turner.

Dame Becky Satterfield had the opportunity to meet Grande Dame Lidia Bastianich while at LDEI's international conference in Newport Beach, California.



It seemed as if every speaker had been greatly impacted by LDEI in a forever changing kind of way, much of which was attributed to mentoring.

For me, the most inspiring part of the conference was meeting Dame Lidia Bastianich, winner of the Grande Dame award. She was so humble, real, and inspiring. She shared her life story and her passion for giving back.

I learned a lot about running a chapter like a business in two different sessions: one from a legal standpoint and one from a practical group session with everyone sharing experiences and solutions to problems.

All of the field trips and tours for this conference were fabulous. And there was dinner on the beach. Our table was honored to have founding

Dame Carol Brock join us. She is still vibrant and involved in everything. I was also pleased to meet the new Dames from New Orleans and Charlotte/Western North Carolina.

Outgoing President, Dame Stacy Zeigler from Atlanta, spoke on how honored she was to have served in the position. She encouraged all Dames to be more involved in moving LDEI forward. Her last responsibility was to hand over the title of president to Dame Hayley Matson-Mathes from Honolulu.

Everything I experienced left me full and happy, and I definitely left with more assets than I had when I arrived. Be sure to read the LDEI Winter 2018 Quarterly for more details on this conference. Mark your calendars for next year's conference in Seattle, October 11-14, 2018.

LDEI Birmingham expands Alabama footprint

By Martha Johnston

The Scholarship and Outreach Committees, led by Dames Tiffany Denson and Rosemary Dallam respectively, are working to expand our chapter reach and broaden our vision via mentoring and an expanded scholarship/grant platform. These two groups will work together to set the criteria for scholarships to young women in high school programs, community college culinary-related programs, and 4-year university programs in food, nutrition and dietetics, culinary, hospitality, and tourism. In addition, they will work with Birmingham Dames to determine the recipient of our Community Organization Grant.

It is our mission to mentor women who are currently in the culinary field as well as making scholarships available to those who want to be. Rosemary Dallam jumped in to do just that by serving as a judge for the Alabama



Dame Rosemary Dallam served as a judge for the Alabama ProStart Competition that saw teams from 12 high schools across Alabama compete in the event.

ProStart® Competition on February 2, 2018. There were 12 high school teams with 3 to 4 participants each who came from Huntsville to Gulf Shores for the event. ProStart® is the high school curriculum designed by the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation that teaches

hospitality, culinary arts, and hotel/restaurant management.

The LDEI scholarship awards we will grant during 2018 will aid and enable young women from our area high schools who have competed in these competitions to continue on their educational path to become professionals in our field.



Lunch at Ted's

Left to right: Jan Gautro, Anne Cain, Leigh Sloss-Corra, Martha Johnston, Sonthe Burge, Rosemary Dallam, Susan Swagler, Angela Schmidt, Jan Walsh, joined Dame Beba Touloupis at her restaurant on November 14. Members enjoyed catching up both personally and professionally, over for a cozy and comforting lunch at Ted's, and afterwards posing in front of the restaurant's new mural.

Meet Our New Members!

Our chapter gained 11 new members in August 2017. The first five were featured in the Winter 2017 newsletter. Here, get to know the remaining six a little better.

Mary Grace Viado

Place of birth: Manila, Philippines

College/professional school(s) attended, major, degree earned:

The Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park NY: Associate Degree in Culinary Arts; University of the Philippines: Bachelor of Science in Hotel & Restaurant Administration

Current position: Corporate Executive Chef at Village Tavern

How did you get your start?

I got my start with Bistro Group at the age of 20 as an assistant kitchen manager for an international brand opening in Manila.



What do you enjoy about your current position? I love the leadership I work for. I am in this industry because of the people and hospitality aspects.

What does success look like to you? Success is giving yourself every day in hopes to make a difference in people's lives.

If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? My mom's spaghetti Bolognese

If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? Since I travel most of the time for work and vacation, I would like to stay home, volunteer and give back to the homeless in Birmingham.

Sidney Fry

Place of birth: Birmingham, AL
Never thought I'd end up back here but I sure am glad I did!

College/professional school(s) attended, major, degree earned:

University of Mississippi: Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics; University of Alabama at Birmingham: Master of Science in Clinical Nutrition

Current position: Digital Advisor and Marketing Strategist at Morgan Stanley and Editorial Nutrition Advisor to My Fitness Pal

How did you get your start?

After completing my dietetic internship, I started my career in metabolic test kitchens, helping design menus for food studies. I shifted into catering, where I spent a few years with Ashley McMakin (of Ashley Mac's) then as Catering Manager at Provence Breads and



Café in Nashville. I then landed a job as Nutrition Editor at *Cooking Light* magazine, where I spent

the next 6/7 years cooking, writing, editing, and eating my way through healthy food content and nutrition for both print and digital platforms.

What do you enjoy about your current position? My current position at Morgan Stanley presented itself as a unique marketing opportunity, and a chance to advance myself forward in the rapidly expanding digital space. I know. It's not food related... but I am having so much fun! The role is brand new for the firm—a leadership position to implement and support digital marketing strategies for financial advisors. I am hoping to use the

knowledge I gain in finance to help women be stronger, better, more savvy financial advocates and business owners. I still keep my hand in food and nutrition, acting as nutrition advisor and writing monthly for My Fitness Pal along with a few other outlets.

What does success look like to you? The ability to balance everything I love: A healthy, happy family; a handful of genuine friends; spare time to constantly meet new people and build new relationships; time to be still and watch my children grow; and time to cook and bake!

Bonus! I eat a bowl of ice cream pretty much every night. Oh, and I have two James Beard Awards for nutrition! It's all about balance, right? Also, I want to write children's books someday. Most likely a series that rhymes and is about food.

Telia Johnson

Place of birth: Born in Cookeville, TN, but raised in Birmingham.

College/professional school(s) attended, major, degree earned: Harding University, bachelor's degree in home economics (the only degree *Southern Living* would take in the test kitchen back in the late 80's!)

How did you get your start?

A career decision was made on my grandmother's kitchen stool around age 8. It was really the only thing I ever wanted to do. Sounds cliché but my background consists of two grandmothers and a mother teaching me far more about food (and the South) than I could ever learn elsewhere. There was a brief time that I was a biology major, but what was the point when I had so much cooking to do. I was lucky enough to

"Baking is the only thing I can do for days on end without it turning into work."



get an internship at *Southern Living* as a senior in college, and I never looked back. I still spend some

time doing freelance work in the kitchen and photo studios at Time Inc. My true love is cake. I have spent decades baking my favorites and sharing with friends and family which eventually turned into a little business called Telia Johnson Cakes. You can find me at Pepper Place Market.

What does success look like to you? For so long, I thought

success was about position and climbing and numbers, but I finally realized that success is true happiness on the journey and being completely satisfied with what you are offering at the end of the day. Baking is the only thing I can do for days on end without it turning into work.

If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? My last meal would be some fresh pasta and an amazing sauce from Trattoria Za'za' in Florence, Italy, but given the chance, I would really love to have my grandmother's Sunday roast just once more.

Andrea Snyder

Place of birth: Red Bank, NJ
College/professional school(s) attended, major, degree earned: University of Alabama, BS in Marketing

Current position: Founder and creator of Urban Cookhouse.

Owner of stores in Homewood, The Summit, downtown Birmingham, and Tuscaloosa

How did you get your start?

I trained in catering sales at Zoe's Kitchen. My husband and I left Zoe's Kitchen and began working on our concept, found a location, raised capital, and opened our first location in Homewood in 2010.



What do you enjoy about your current position? The ability to be creative and motivate others to bring results in particular areas. Also developing people and using my influence to bring out the best in everyone.

What does success look like to you? Success to me is a life where I am using the gifts God had given me to fulfill my purpose of influenc-

ing and creating opportunities for others to use their gifts. Success is working in an environment where people love their job and enjoy working together, with an over-all attitude of non-complacency and acceptance of change.

If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? A top-notch charcuterie and cheese plate!

If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? I would need a little more than one week, but I am dying to explore India! I would want to get a local's view of the people, food, religion.

Brittany Garrigus

Place of birth: Childersburg, AL
College/professional school(s) attended, major, degree earned: Certificate in culinary arts from Jefferson State Community College. I started here on a dual-enrollment program while I was still in high school.

Current position: Head pastry chef at Satterfield's

How did you get your start?

After I finished school, I started at Olexa's Bakery making buttercream and cakes, tempering chocolate, making gelato, and decorating cakes. On occasion I worked on the

line and waited on tables in the restaurant. I then moved to Angel's Cakes & Confections. My next move was to Frank and Pardis Stitt's restaurant group to work with Dolester Miles and build my knowledge of plating desserts, timing, and professionalism. At The Club, I was head pastry chef and had three others working with me to produce up to 1,500 desserts for a single event like the July 4th Celebration.

What do you enjoy about your current position? Creative freedom, the quiet of having the kitchen to myself in the morning,



and being able to choose the best seasonal ingredients available.
What does success look like to you? Happiness and meeting new challenges.

If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? Burger and fries, all the way—and chocolate cake!

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 Greece to study Greek mythology or to the CIA for advanced pastry training.

Bonus! On November 17, 2018, I will marry Jacob Chetham, and yes, I'm doing my own wedding cake: French vanilla with buttercream.

Carey Thomasson

Place of birth: Seattle, WA. I spent just the first year of my life there. At the age of one, my family packed up and moved to Europe and bought a VW camper where we traveled and lived for 18 months. Upon returning to the US, we moved to Greenwich CT, where I lived and went to school through 11th grade. I spent my senior year in high school as an exchange student in Reciefe, Brazil, traveling the country and EATING!! It was amazing to eat things so different from what CT had to offer, especially all the tropical fruit.

College/professional school(s) attended, major, degree earned: I went to St. Lawrence University in upstate New York, 20 miles from the Canadian border, which was a total shock to the system. I got a bachelor's in arts and science, with a major in theater and art history.



Current position? How did you get your start?

My life has taken me to live in NYC, Los Angeles,

and around the globe before landing me here in Birmingham with my amazing husband and two fabulous children, Flynn (11) and Hollis (10). I am the chef owner of DINNER in Crestline Village, a store that has been being designed in my mind for the last 30 years. I love everything about what I do, it is everything I have ever dreamed it would be and more. I get to feed my community healthy, delicious, beautiful food that people can feel great about feeding their families.

What does success look like to you? Success to me is the repeat customers, the referrals we get from those customers, and the compli-

ments that I get whenever I am out in public.

If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? I REALLY hope that my last meal is a LONG way off but if I had to plan it now, It would include copious amounts of lobster tails with drawn butter, (NOT CLARIFIED) Endive Salad with perfectly ripe pears, Stilton Cheese and pecans, and fresh flat leaf parsley leaves, picked at the last minute. OF course there would be beautiful wine, and carrot cake with a slightly salty vanilla cream cheese frosting and a old chewy Tawney Port, preferably from 1977.

If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? If I had a week off from everything and \$5,000, I would book Dan and I on the cheap seats to Tuscan so we could spend the majority of the money on food and wine and a beautiful hotel. YUM! I may never come home!

2018 programs update

By Christiana Roussel

As VP Programs for our chapter, I have been hard at work developing a mix of fun, educational and social events for 2018. I am using Paperless Post as our primary invitation system which I trust you all are familiar with. With Paperless Post, we can track who has received and replied to invitations, as well as share important information (attire, directions, event cost, etc.) For planning purposes, it is very important that you respond to these invitations in a timely manner. No one will be able to attend every event but we hope to see you at as many as possible!

If you have an idea for a program or want to host something at your home or place of business, please let me know. Not all dates are set in stone yet as I do not want to conflict with other Birmingham happenings which might vie for your professional attention but here is an outline of things to be on the lookout for this calendar year:

February

- 26th—Favorite Things Party
This is a purely social event where we will all get a chance to learn more about one another through a fun game. Each dame is asked to bring three of their favorite things, not costing more than \$10 per item. Upon arrival at the party, dames will put their name into a pot, three times. As dames stand up and introduce their favorite things to the group, they will draw names to give their favorite things away. So, each dame will come with three things and go home with three different things—and a whole lot of new ideas!

March

- Book club—date/location TBD
- 28th—Membership Social.
Come meet and greet nominees; The Gardens Café, Birmingham Botanical Gardens at 5 p.m.

April

- Visit a new restaurant—user pay OR
- Cocktails at Leslie Register's home (weather and garden blooms permitting!)

May

- Visit Pursell Farms—Tour the property and enjoy an afternoon with Chef Andrea Griffiths; user pay. I am also considering opening this event up to friends of Dames so that we can generate a large enough group.

June

- Hypertufa class at Charlie Thigpen's—user pay

July

- Visit a new restaurant—user pay



St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church in Brookside, Alabama is the site of an annual Slavic/Russian Food Festival.

August

- 19th - Annual business meeting (if no conflict with Southern Makers event)
- New member reception—date/location TBD
- Book club—date/location TBD

September

- Volunteer as a group (thinking Cooks on a Mission)

October

- Autumn floral arrangement class with Dorothy McDaniel—user pay
- LDEI Birmingham Fundraiser—date TBD

November

- Book club—date/location TBD
- Field Trip—35th Annual St. Nicholas Slavic/Russian Food Festival, Brookside, Alabama which takes place Saturday, November 3 (10-4) and Sunday, November 4, (12-5) www.stnicholasbrookside.org

December (OPEN)

Panama

Martha Johnston

As the plane came down in Panama, I was thrilled to look out the window and realize that we were on the west side of the Panama Canal and flying low enough that I could see both old and new locks. When we came around over the Pacific Ocean, the Bahi'a de Panama including the barrier islands and the downtown area. My seat companion, a young man from Panama who just finished his college degree in the U.S., told me that in all the trips he'd flow into the city this was the first time he'd been able to see the canal and this view of the city. I felt it was my first "gift" from this country.

When close friends suggested that I join them on a trip to Panama, the first things that came to mind were: Panama Canal, rainforests, flora, fauna, culinary friends, coffee, political history. But I found it to be so much more, especially when it comes to food.

It may surprise you to know that Panama has one of the most exciting food scenes in Latin America. Panamanian cuisine reflects a mix of ethnicities, diverse regional produce, and cooking influences from the Afro-Caribbean, Spanish, and indigenous cultures. Street food, fondas, cafes, and farm-to-table restaurants abound. You will find food from every part of the world: Italy, France, Japan, Argentina, Venezuela, Bolivia, Egypt, Mexico, Thailand, Middle East, China, United States. Each is really good and true to its own roots.

Casco Viejo is the one neighborhood in Panama City you must visit. It is undergoing a thorough renovation prompted by UNESCO

..... Dames Recommend



Children from the Embera Indian Village enjoy an afternoon swim on the banks of the Chagres River.

designating it a World Heritage Site in 1997. Turn-of-the-19th century mansions, apartments, and buildings are being lovingly restored and turned into stylish boutique hotels, restaurants, bistros, brewpubs, art galleries, and private residences. The churches are also being refurbished for a 2019 visit from the Pope. It reminded me a lot of the French Quarter in New Orleans.

Adventures:

- Walking tour of Casco Viejo Sights: Plaza de la Independencia, Palacio Presidential, Plaza Bolivar, Teatro Nacional, Iglesia de Santo Domingo, Museo de Arte Religioso Colonial.

- Gamboa Rainforest Tour: After boarding a small motorboat, we went up the edge of the Panama Canal to reach the jungle. We saw monkeys, butterflies, birds, wildlife, turtles, etc. and a Panamanian television show cast feeding the monkeys as they filmed for an upcoming episode.

- Embera Indian Village: The Indians shared their lives in the village where they have resettled on the banks of the Chagres River. It is still very simple as it has been for centuries. Water comes from a stream across the lake in 3-inch plastic pipe. Although there isn't electricity, they have propane tanks to fuel the equipment when they cook for visitors. They prepared a typical Embera lunch of fried fish and plantains for us and were pleased to share fresh fruit we'd brought along. A folkloric dance show followed and the opportunity to look at their many crafts. The young Panamanian TV show stars changed to native costumes and joined in the fun.

- Miraflores Locks at Panama Canal: Don't miss the film presentation in English or Spanish. This is a great platform from which to see the old and new locks on the Canal. Our mid-afternoon arrival served us well as many visitors were leaving and it left the viewing rails open.



The Festival of Flowers and Coffee takes place on the banks of the Caldera River in Boquete every January.

Boutique Hotels:

- La Isabela Suites: Be prepared to climb stairs as there are no elevators here. Kitchen, wifi, comfortable.
- Las Clementina's: Lovely suites after your climb. Each has its own personality, kitchen, wifi.

To Eat & Drink:

- Maito: Panamanian/contemporary and is considered one of the best in the city. Worth the trip to the San Francisco area. Innovative.
- Caliope Restaurant: Fusion/Contemporary but not the sophistication of Maito. Desserts were interesting.
- Restaurant 9 [Cathedral Hotel]: If steaks are your favorite, try this one. Beef sourced from around the world. Enjoyed new wine finds.
- The Strangers Club: Fun, neighborhood bistro. Good food and service.
- René Café: Peruvian menu with a \$10 lunch special.
- Mi Ranchito: On the Amador Causeway, this restaurant has an amazing harbor view overlooking

the city plus good Mexican food, sangria, margaritas.

- Super Gourmet: Breakfast and lunch café/store.

• Paul's French Pastry Shop: Delicious—get some to go. Breads, desserts, quiche, sandwiches.

• Stickhouse Café...Gelato, Food, Chocolate: Don't miss this visual feast! You may find yourself with more than one "stick" of deliciousness.

- Casa Sucre Coffee House

Shopping:

• Undercover: Panama's only rainboot store also featuring fine hand-crafts from the area. The owner has just broken into the US market with rainboots designed to reflect a theme [rainforest, Indian tribe]. A portion of each sale with benefit the group featured in her designs.

• Casco Viejo Promenade: Local vendors have lots of quality hand-crafts on this area off Paseo Esteban Huertas.

• El Re: This leading supermarket chain in Panama has a small store-

front in Casco Viejo, wine and groceries on the first floor and pharmacy/personal items on the 2nd.

Boquete is located in a green, flower-filled deep valley on the flank of the Barú Volcano and shore of the Caldera River in the Chiriquí Highlands. We took a flight from Panama City to David and then made the short drive arriving in Boquete shortly after noon. The town has an international feel due to the number of folks who have moved there from the U.S., Canada, and Europe. There are lots of international restaurants and no shortage of activities.

Feria de las Flores y del Cafe was in full swing when we arrived [mid-January] and had drawn thousands to the area for the 10-day event. There were lush flowers, food stands, amusement rides, two music stages/discos that go all night, hand-crafts, and very little coffee [even the locals were mystified by this].

The bajareque, a unique weather phenomenon of fine misting rain,

occurs here from December to March, and it did provide endless rainbows during our stay. Hiking, climbing, kayaking, bird watching, and touring coffee plantations can easily fill your day.

Adventures:

• Casa Ruiz Coffee Plantation Tour: Visit this plantation that has fertile volcanic soil and high altitude required for coffee growing. Hike through the trees and then tour the processing, roasting, and packing facilities before joining the staff for a coffee tasting.

• Flower & Coffee Festival: A \$2 ticket will get you into the fair grounds and rides. Go early in the day to avoid the large crowds.

• Central Market Stalls: The farmers' market in the center of town offers beautiful produce, meats and seafood. It is quickly apparent why there are so many beautiful salads served in Panama.

Boutique Hotel:

• Boquete Garden Inn Hotel: This is a hotel you'll want to call directly for the best rates (507-720-2376). Gorgeous garden setting with well-appointed, expansive rooms. Complimentary breakfast is served on the patio, a great location for bird watching too. Don't miss the local artifacts in the bar area.

To Eat & Drink:

- The Panamonte: Chef Charlie Collins, a long-time friend, cooks with local products, herbs and fruits from an on-sight garden and an international perspective. Best Sancocho ever! Located in the Hotel Panamonte. Stop in the bar area with its roaring fireplace for a before or after-dinner drink.
- Butcher Chop House: Chef Davide Caré focuses on meat and home-



Above: Native women hand sort coffee beans at the Ruiz plantation outside Boquete.

At right: Although George's Fireside Inn is a bit rustic, the chef's talent and creativity in using produce from his garden with other local ingredients ensures outstanding food, be it simple or complicated.



made sausages. His "smoke box" for putting more smoke on meats as they are served at the table is quite unique. Casual, delicious, fun.

- La Casona Mexicana: Authentic Mexican food and beverages with patio seating.
- Otto's: Authentic Italian menu and deli. Also owned by Chef Davide Caré. From salads to lasagna and wine...it is all delicious.
- George's Fireside Inn [and Boquete Beach Club]: Walk "1 minute" up the road from the Boquete Garden Inn and you're there. This Egyptian-born, Canadian-trained

chef has one of the most eclectic restaurants ever. It became our go-to place. The menu written on chalk boards includes lobster bisque, duck, chicken, pizza, coconut shrimp, Egyptian appetizers, pasta, to name a few. But if you chat with George a bit, he'll cook something up just for you, even if he has to go to his own garden for tomatoes, avocados, greens. Oh, beer is \$1 and wine and drinks are available.

• Coffee & Chocolate: Watch as the staff prepares handmade chocolates, then try one with a cup of delicious coffee.



The candlelight ambiance at Hartwood is appealing especially given there is no real electricity here and all cook with fire.

Mexico

Angela Schmidt

A spur-of-the-moment trip to Tulum on the Yucatán Peninsula did not disappoint. My hotel, Casa Ambar, was tucked behind little shops on the most happening strip along the beach. The design was bohemian jungle chic and the staff was wonderful too. Each day I biked down to the beach, enjoying the bustle of taxis and tourists along the way.

While in Tulum, I connected with a couple of chefs, Susana Trilling from Oaxaca and Emma Lepp from Napa. My main reason to come was to experience Hartwood and my desire to understand the heart of Yucatán cuisine. Hartwood is a well known restaurant helmed by a couple of NYC chefs who came for vacation and decided to stay. Reservations must be made a month in advance and seating is limited. Each day, diners line up at 5:30 vying for a seat. And the space remains hopping the rest of the night.

There is no real electricity on this

part of the peninsula, everything is run off generators and solar panels so lighting is primarily candlelight and everyone cooks with fire. The cocktails, the food, and vibe at Hartwood were both rustic and beautiful.

But the real gem of this trip was my experience at Arca. Just a few spots down from Hartwood, the scene is a bit more refined but still very much relaxed. Due to Susana's connections, we were treated to personal service from the chef, Jose Luis Hinostrero. He's originally from San Diego and his family is from Tijuana. Jose Luis has worked at Alinea in Chicago and Noma in Copenhagen. As part of the research and development team for Noma Mexico, he came with René Redzepi and decided to stay afterwards.

After being in Tulum for just a few days, I totally understand why these chefs decided to stay. The food at Arca was at another level, executed perfectly, and tantalizing. While both Hartwood and Arca

were worthwhile for understanding the Yucatán cuisine, the real heart is in the taquerias.

La Eufemia is located on the beach and is a popular happy hour spot. The music is mostly reggae; there are mattresses and tables on the beach; and there is a two-tiered porch packed with diners. My favorite taco was the chicharrone, softened pork skin bathed in a delicious sauce that was to die for.

On my way to the the airport, we made a stop in the city center for Taqueria Honorio, a popular breakfast and lunch spot a block off the main road. Although they are loved for their Cochinita Pibil, Lechón and Poc-Chuc (roasted pork), I thought the best was the Pavo de Relleno Negro (turkey in black sauce). The tortillas were small and slightly thicker than most. Almost certainly made by nixtamal, these tortillas were the perfect vehicle for these Yucatán meats. The tacos were so good, I had to pack a Torta de Lechón for my long day of traveling back home.

Behind the scenes: Betsy McAtee

By Christiana Roussel

As the CEO of Dreamland Holding Company LLC, Betsy McAtee knows a thing or two about what brings people together—great food. But behind all those ribs and pulled pork sandwiches is a commitment to putting the customer first and a lot of hard work. While McAtee may have started her work life selling pantyhose at Parisian, she soon moved up the ladder and changed careers, eventually working her way up to the top of the barbecue empire. The common theme from each of her past jobs has been tenacity and a whole lot of hard work. Every day starts the same way for McAtee and her leadership team but where the day takes her form there, changes constantly. Of course, she'll be the first to tell you that she would most like to be in one of her stores, eating alongside her customers.

How many locations do you have and how often do you visit each one?

We have 10 restaurant locations total (two of which are franchised units) and a USDA manufacturing facility here in Birmingham. The USDA facility is where we produce the product that is sold online all across the country!

Because my office is located near the USDA facility, I am there almost daily. I try and get to the local restaurants in Tuscaloosa and Birmingham once or twice a week, and the out-of-town locations I get to once every two weeks. My "ideal" week is to be in the restaurants every day!

What does your management team look like?

Each restaurant location has their own management team consisting of a general manager, kitchen manager, front of house manager, and a catering salesperson.

Our leadership team is responsible for supporting the restaurants, which in turn serve our guests. Our leadership team consists of human resources, marketing, finance, and operations. The operations team is comprised of a fleet/facilities manager, a training manager and the director of operations. It is our largest team and their responsibility is to be in our restaurant locations daily.

How do you stay dialed into the business?

We have a daily huddle with our leadership team (HR, finance, marketing, and operations) each morning at 8:58am. We discuss the priorities of the day and relevant topics. We also have a weekly meeting where we go much more in depth discussing the priorities of each function, guest experiences, and tracking our progress against our quarterly and annual goals.

Additionally, we have a monthly conference call with all of our general managers so that everyone is aligned with the vision and priorities of the company. I also talk EVERYDAY (sometimes multiple times a day) to our operations manager.

However the best way to stay dialed in is to visit our restaurant locations and spend time with all of our wonderful employees (front of house, back of house, and manag-



Dame Betsy McAtee, CEO of Dreamland Holding Company LLC

ers) who serve our guests and also visiting with our guests during their meal.

What is your favorite part of your job?

It's hard to name just one! I love to hear the stories of our guests and their connection to Dreamland! The story often begins with "my first Dreamland experience was..." It ranges from visiting with their father/brother or how we were a part of family celebrations.

I also enjoy when we have employee recognition events and celebrate the longevity of our team members. We recently had a 20th anniversary celebration in Mobile for that store location and all of their employees. I had an employee that brought me her first paycheck she received from her first day at Dreamland 20 years ago!

continued on page 14, see McAtee

What is your least favorite part of the job?

Well there are several of those here too! All the regulations that seem to get imposed on restaurants when we really just want to serve our guests by offering them great food! The razor thin margins in our industry make it hard to be able to support all the things we would like to do so we have to be real strategic in everything we do! That sometimes involves saying “no” to things we would love to support or do or buy! And lastly, weather “events” like ...snow...ice...HA HA!

But really, I feel honored and blessed to be able to do what I do every day so it never really seems like work!

Thanks Betsy for this peek into your world. We promise to look for you at a Dreamland BBQ restaurant soon!

.....*Let's Toast*.....

Brooke Bell has been promoted to Vice President Culinary and Custom Content at Hoffman Media.



Ashley McMakin, owner and operator of Ashley Mac’s, opened a new location in Homewood’s SOHO Square in February. This is the fourth Ashley Mac’s location.

Jennifer Yarborough, owner and operator of Crestline Bagel Company and Crestline Catering Company, has opened a new location for Crestline Bagels in Cahaba Heights at 4117 Crosshatch Drive.



Jan Walsh’s BirminghamRestaurants.com has been named an Amazon Influencer by Amazon. This new program recognizes businesses that have large social media followings on Instagram and/or Twitter and has a new page of food product recommendations for home cooks.

.....*Events Calendar*.....

Monday, Feb. 26	6 p.m.	Favorite Things Party The John Hand Club, 1st Avenue North & 20th Street
Thursday, Mar. 15	5 p.m.	New member nominations close Applications due to Gia McCollister
Wednesday, Mar. 28	5 p.m.	Membership social event [to meet potential new members] The Gardens Café, Birmingham Botanical Gardens
Saturday, April 21	11 a.m.	Gumbo Gala at Sloss Furnace Dames to judge event

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