

# Panache

Newsletter of Les Dames d'Escoffier Chicago **Spring 2013**

## WHEN WEATHER IS YOUR TOUGHEST CLIENT

By Portia Belloc Lowndes

Frost. Floods. Drought. Winds. These are variables that most of us do not have to think about affecting our businesses. Yet for farmers, chefs and farmers markets, these unpredictable forecasts can throw a wrench in the best of planning. Last year we had a very early spring that rightfully made many farmers nervous; their fears were met with a frost in May that ruined many fruit crops. This year we have experienced a cold spring and a good part of Illinois was flooded.

"The late spring truly didn't affect us as much as the flooding," said John Caveny, owner of Caveny Farm in Monticello, Ill. "We have had some very mild winters in years past so there is a perception that spring is late, when truly our growing schedule is pretty smack on. The flood threw us back more as we lost important work days, but fortunately we did get some of the early crops such as our onions and garlic in before the rain hit."

Also fortunately for Bronwyn Weaver of Heritage Prairie Farm in Elborn, Ill., much of the early farming is in hoop houses that protect the early crops from unseasonable weather. She has a strong micro greens business and an events business that are not affected by the spring weather. However, as a top bee keeper in the area, she is always thinking about her bees. "More concerning to me right now is the lack of blossoms opening for our honey bees. Usually the bees are very hungry for food sources this time of year and depend on having nectar by now. We are fortunate in

that we left a larger than normal amount of honey for the bees to eat over the winter and are hoping they will survive just fine until the tree blossoms finally open up."

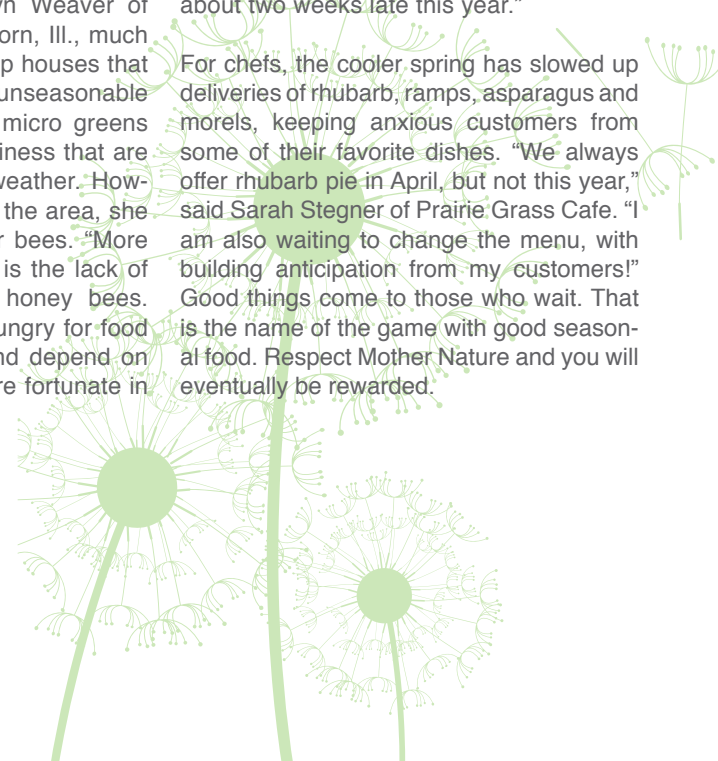
Through the years, there has been a growing awareness of eating within the rhythm of the seasons. We know we can get tomatoes year round at any supermarket, but nothing is better than a locally grown tomato in season. So while consumers may be growing tired of root vegetables, there is an inherent craving and excitement building for local fresh farm produce.

The number of vendors at the Green City Market waivers a bit more at the indoor market at Peggy Notebaert Museum, and foot traffic slows when the weather is poor. Dana Benigno, Executive Director of Green City Market, said that "the farmers are reporting a cool, wet spring, but they prefer this year to last year's spring heat wave followed by frost. Asparagus will be about two weeks late this year."

For chefs, the cooler spring has slowed up deliveries of rhubarb, ramps, asparagus and morels, keeping anxious customers from some of their favorite dishes. "We always offer rhubarb pie in April, but not this year," said Sarah Stegner of Prairie Grass Cafe. "I am also waiting to change the menu, with building anticipation from my customers!" Good things come to those who wait. That is the name of the game with good seasonal food. Respect Mother Nature and you will eventually be rewarded.



Bronwyn Weaver checks on her bees at Heritage Prairie Farm





## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Chicago Dames,

Ah, spring! It's finally here in Chicago. It took long enough, didn't it? I love the spring weather and all of the blooming trees and flowers. Chicago is always such a beautiful city but I think it is especially lovely in the springtime, even when it rains.

Over the long winter months, we've done so much in our chapter, including launching Amuse Bouche, the electronic bulletin of everything you need to know about what's happening in the Chicago Chapter, as well as holding our first Town Hall Meeting, which was informative and well attended. At that Town Hall Meeting and then at the subsequent Board meeting after, we decided as a chapter to keep our beloved Panache newsletter, albeit in a slightly smaller format, with a new editor and some familiar bylines. I am so proud that our chapter cares so much about being well informed and involved that we now have two incredible forms of communication: Amuse Bouche for the timely news and Panache, a beautiful and informative publication about our members, their travels and interests.

I'm always amazed by the creative ways members get involved. Whether it is participating in the Town Hall Meeting, answering a call for proposals for new community service initiatives or donating time and money, the dedication to this organization is always inspiring. Take Sharon Olson and Sue Ling Gin, who both donated recent speaker fees to our scholarship fund. I am so grateful that they both thought of such a creative (and simple) way to give back to the organization. Thank you, so much, Sharon and Sue Ling.

I'm also thrilled with the passion I see in members about our incredible Scholarship and Mentoring Program that leads us to honor women studying culinary arts with

not only scholarship dollars but also the chance to be mentored by the members of our chapter – worth its weight in gold in my opinion. Thank you to Judith Dunbar-Hines and her outstanding team for the work they did to award these deserving women.

Speaking of passion, we've seen such an outpouring of support for our Nutrition Literacy Program that we have run at the McCormick Boys and Girls club over the last several years that we have decided to continue working with the club to find Les Dames members who are willing to teach cooking classes to these bright and interested children (see article on Page 4). I also am assigning a task force to review the chapter's Green Table Initiative and the ideas submitted by members for community service projects. The task force will be charged with making a recommendation to the board on how best to deploy the chapter's energy and commitment toward these programs.

And I can't talk about passion without discussing the Board of Directors and Nominating Committee. The board runs your organization and it is no small feat. This year we have four board members completing their terms and I can't thank them enough for the dedication and hard work they've given to our chapter. Thank you, Veronica Hastings, Catherine Koelling, Mary Reidy-McMahon, and Jean True. With board members completing terms, the Nominating Committee, chaired by JeanMarie Brownson with a great team, has provided a terrific slate of board candidates that we will ratify at our upcoming Annual Meeting on June 19 at the Racquet Club in Chicago. Thank you to JeanMarie and her committee for making sure the leadership of this organization continues to work its hardest for you, the members.

Sincerely,

### Executive Board 2012-2013

**President:** Jennifer Lamplough

**Vice President:** Susan Parenti

**Treasurer:** Linda Avery

**Secretary:** Cheryl Corrado

**Past President:** Sharon Olson

### Board of Directors:

Veronica Hastings

Judith Dunbar Hines

Shannon Kinsella

Catherine Koelling

Mary Reidy McMahon

Candace Warner

Jean True



Learning to make hard cooked eggs, deviled eggs, egg salad and omelets at the Boys & Girls Club.



Carrie Nahabedian

## THE SEQUEL TO A SUCCESS IS ANOTHER SUCCESS

By Joan Reardon

It's difficult to know the attraction that Time-Life's *The Cooking of Provincial France* had for a ten-year-old Niles girl who wanted to be a veterinarian more than anything else. No matter, she cooked her way from bouillabaisse to clafoutis aux cerise, then closed the book until seven years later when she began a culinary career. "I was 17 and was working in room service at the Ritz-Carlton. I organized all the food and had a lot of interaction with the chefs . . . It was easy to speak to them, and I begged the chef to let me come and work in the kitchen. So, he gave me my first cooking job. I made \$4.25 an hour in 1976. Then I graduated to saucier for The Dining Room. We were packed nightly, and it was a rough service, especially since I was still in high school and had to be at my first class at 8 a.m."

After graduation, Carrie Nahabedian decided that rather than attend the Culinary Institute of America, working the line with experienced chefs would provide a more

valuable culinary education. So, she shadowed the Ritz's chef de cuisine, Fernand Gutierrez, who also became her mentor. But before doing that, she knew that she "had to overcome the misconception that women only belonged at the garde manger station. I needed to work harder and stand out more than my male counterparts. I learned very early that knowledge was power, so I made sure I studied the history of French classical cuisine."

Carrie decided to travel to Europe, where Paris touched her soul. When she returned to Chicago, she completed her culinary training in forward-looking restaurants such as Sinclair's in Lake Forest and the Park Hyatt. No longer an apprentice, she was appointed executive sous chef at the Four Seasons, and she worked at the chain's various hotels on the west coast for ten years, including Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. But the lure of Chicago and the desire to do her own thing prevailed. She returned to Chicago, and in partnership with her cousin Michael, Carrie opened Naha in the former location of Gordon's [Sinclair] eponymous restaurant. The kitchen emphasized locally farmed ingredients and concentrated on American dishes with a Mediterranean flavor.

Carrie infused Naha with her personality, style, and warmth. "It's not an anonymous restaurant," she said. "There is a reason why people come back two and three times a week; they are comfortable here." But never one to rest on her laurels, Carrie knew that when a storefront space became available in the next block north of Naha, she could fulfill her dream of a riff on Parisian cuisine by opening a fifty-seat "stunning, sexy, and small" restaurant she named Brindille, translated from French as a "branch." But for Carrie, it also is a "new growth."

From the days of her childhood, Carrie knew that the family she was born into believed that food was the center of the universe. Growing up, her favorite food was a peanut butter and [Welch's] grape jelly sandwich. It still is. However, she also remembers visits to restaurants to celebrate special birthdays, her mother's daily home-cooked meals, her father's steaks grilled outdoors even in winter, and the crisp flavor of radishes in season. Naha's menus reflect those familiar childhood dishes.

The success of both Naha and Brindille is a tribute to Carrie's sense of style and

impeccable palate, and Carrie's awards are almost too numerous to mention. She has been nominated for three consecutive James Beard Foundation Awards as well as Best Chef of the Midwest and Best Chef in the Great Lakes. In 2005, The Nahaburger was voted #2 in Chicago by The Chicago Tribune. Carrie also has spearheaded the Armenian Tree Project, the re-greening of Armenia to free the country from the ravages of war, by holding events at Naha to finance the effort. She is unstintingly generous with her time, contributing to many civic and charitable organizations and hosting culinary events sponsored by many culinary organizations, including the Chicago chapter of Les Dames d'Escoffier.

Her great joy is also her participation in the annual Armenian Street Fest that takes place at St. Gregory the Illuminator Armenian Church at 6700 West Diversey Ave. every August. She has even arranged special demonstrations and hands-on pastry classes at St. Gregory's to share the intricacies of the phyllo pastries—bourma and baklava—with Les Dames. Featured in prestigious newspapers and magazines, her activities have made Naha a destination restaurant. And her efforts have been acknowledged universally. She is a Dame without peer, and a Chicago treasure.

## From the Editors

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# LES DAMES NUTRITION LITERACY PROGRAM THRIVES

By Sharon Olson

When Chicago decided to support the organic garden program at the McCormick Boys & Girls Club, there was a dream that this program would grow and could become a model for after-school nutrition literacy programs in the Chicago area. Funding from Les Dames helped to develop the garden and a demonstration kitchen. Chapter members contributed their time and expertise to teaching classes, conducting cooking demonstrations and supporting the hands-on work in the garden. The program has not only grown, it has thrived.

Member advocates have presented this program at Les Dames International meetings and in webinars. The Chicago program has been offered to other chapters that may wish to develop similar programs. Mary Abbott Hess has presented the program to members of the local community and gained additional support. Residents from The Admiral, an upscale residential complex for seniors, promoted a Designer Garage Sale that raised funds for the program and inspired additional volunteers. The Bridgeview Bank employees identified the Boys & Girls Club as their annual community service project and are providing

materials and manpower to repair the masonry of the two large raised garden beds and potentially to improve the watering system.

Jean True, Green Tables Chair, orchestrated chef members of the Chicago chapter with the support of the Board of Directors for seven food stations at a fund-raiser at Worlds of Whirlpool; a generous portion of the proceeds were dedicated to the McCormick Club. Donating skills, enthusiasm and food were Breanna Beike, Lee Calihan, Maria Josefa Concannon, Donna Hesk, Anne Kauffmann, Norma Maloney, Julie Ratowitz and Debbie Sharpe.

Les Dames members continue to support the program as guest chefs and instructors providing classes for the students. Anyone who has done it once wants to come back again to see the joy the program brings to the kids.

The nutrition literacy program is considered one of McCormick's most unique programs. It has been developed into a replicable model that could give any after-school program in the Chicago area a head start in developing nutrition literacy for children.



*Excited hands respond to "Who wants hot sauce on their deviled eggs?"*