



Fall 2015



PANACHE

Quarterly Newsletter, Les Dames D'Escoffier Chicago

In This Issue: Summer Pleasures President's Letter A Negroni Recipe Meet Two Board Members.

Summer pleasures: Chicago Dames read, roll and ... eat

The summer season offers so many pleasures in Chicago. Time for a vacation book, perhaps? Listen to jazz, al fresco? Learn a new game? For Dames d'Escoffier members, this summer included all three of these, and plenty of food of course!

1} Many good things, plus an author, and one sweet novel

"I gathered the...ingredients from the pantry -- sugar, a little baking powder, flour and blood oranges. As I cracked each egg into the bowl and added the sugar while the mixer did its work, I wondered whether I was the only person who found the whir of a stand mixer oddly comforting. For me, it was the sound of something good about to happen."

— Neeley O'Neil, pastry chef and cake whisperer in *The Cake Therapist*, by Judith Fertig

And something very good did indeed happen when 12 members of Les Dames Chicago's Dames Who Read group gathered on July 28 at Nina Barrett's Bookends and Beginnings bookstore in Evanston. For the first time, an author was present at the group's meeting: Kansas City chapter Dame Judith Fertig revealed the influences and inspirations for people, places and flavors in her first novel, *The Cake Therapist*.

She discussed her idea for the book, the process of getting it written, the time it took to develop, and how it got its attractive cover. She said a possible five-book series will reveal more of the story of the favorite characters in the first volume.

Several local Dames made contributions to the evening. An extraordinary rainbow cake

mimicked the one on the cover of the book and was prepared by Debbie Sharpe's Goddess and the Grocer. A fascinating combo of rosewater and raspberry flavored another cake (similar to the cover of Fertig's other new release *Bake Happy*), created by Jenny Lewis. Judith Hines baked Fertig's recipe for "Creativity Kickstarter" cookies with flavors of cardamom, orange, lemon and mint. And bubbly was the accompaniment, provided by Veronica Hastings and Karen Levin. Nina Barrett arranged for the salad and accompaniments that began the evening.

Thank you to the Dames who made the evening so delicious, and especially to Judith Fertig for travelling to Chicago for our meeting. It was a thrill to have you here!

Note: Dames Who Read will gather September 28 to discuss the next selection *The Billionaire's Vinegar*. Watch for details on the Dames Website soon.

-- Judith Dunbar Hines

2} Smooth vocals and a posh potluck

It was a pleasant and warm, midsummer night. Luckily, the showers earlier in the day decided not to return when 16 Dames and guests met up August 9 for the 15th annual Ravinia Potluck Picnic and to see and hear Diana Krall. As usual, Dames brought their favorite dishes, including a Mediterranean cheese platter, roast chicken with za'tar spices, Italian sandwiches, grilled chicken kabobs and five lovely salads.

For the first time in a record-setting 15 years, Maria Concannon couldn't make the event

because of a wedding in Mexico. We missed her famous guacamole, so Karen Levin did her best to recreate the dish, paired with her summery margaritas.

Krall, a jazz pianist and singer, didn't miss a beat with her famously smooth vocals and cover songs of favorite rock n' roll artists from her new CD, "Wallflower." Dames took turns taking the short walk to the pavilion to see her up close, returning for more food, wine, and lovely peach pie and plum cake for dessert. All in all, we made it another memorable Ravinia night.

-- Amelia and Karen Levin

3} On the lawn, Bocce ball and cocktails

On a recent Chicago summer's eve, under a clear sky with perfect weather, a group of Dames and their husbands took to the courts in River Forest to learn the ancient game of bocce. The friendly-but-competitive spirit, fortified by Negroni and Bellini cocktails and fueled by a delicious array of Mediterranean-inspired appetizers, led to several animated games, lots of laughs, and the discovery that we have some true rollers in the group! Rita Gutekanst kept the libations going, while Gina Voci and her husband, Ed, gave instructions on how to play the game. Easy to learn, easy to play, and the perfect excuse to socialize, sip, and savor, led one guest to quip, "This should be the official sport of Les Dames d'Escoffier International!"

(continued on page 2, photos on page 4)





PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Chicago Dames,

Our Annual Dinner in June was wonderful in many ways, not the least of which was the spectacular display by Mother Nature and the fabulous member turnout despite the storm.

We welcomed 10 new members to our sisterhood, enjoyed a glass (or two) of wine, and reveled in each other's company.

It has been 33 years since the founding of the LDE Chicago Chapter, and we can be justifiably proud of what we have accomplished. Each year, our Scholarship Committee thoughtfully reviews applications, interviews candidates and selects a group of deserving young women from Chicagoland culinary and hospitality schools as scholarship recipients. In 2015, we are again awarding \$30,000 in scholarships. Kudos to Scholarship Chair Patty Erd and her committee on a job well done!

Of course, our involvement doesn't stop there. Mentorship Chair Melissa Yen pairs each of the winners with a Chicago Dame to mentor their burgeoning careers. We provide an invaluable service to these young women that goes well beyond writing a check.

In addition, we made grants to two non-profit endeavors, both carefully vetted by the LDE Board of Directors: \$10,000 to the Roberti Community House in Waukegan, and \$5000 to support the publication of "Food City: The Chicago Encyclopedia," from the University of Illinois Press.

If you're keeping track, that's \$45,000 in charitable funds distributed this year. Newer members might wonder, "Where does this money come from?" Which brings me to the matter at hand: the upcoming 2016 LDE Chicago Fundraiser. Every other year, we put on a big event with the goal of raising enough money to fund our scholarships and community outreach programs for the next two years. I'm thrilled that Dames Melissa Graham and Julie Ratowitz have stepped up to chair the event, but we need each and every member to participate. Watch for information about fundraising committee meetings and please attend. The event will be in mid-May, with an exciting new venue and theme TBA, so stay tuned!

Fondly,



Les Dames d'Escolier International

Executive Board 2014-2015

President: Julie Chernoff
President Elect: Mary Reidy McMahon
Past President: Jennifer Lamplough
Treasurer: Polly Peters
Secretary: Anne Kauffmann

Board of Directors:

Catherine Deevy
Patricia Erd
Margaret Laport
Donna Pierce
Kathy Ruff
Melissa Yen

Summer pleasures: Chicago Dames read, roll and ... eat (continued)

Following bocce, the group re-convened at the Voci home, where they enjoyed an alfresco potluck buffet dinner, lively conversation, and (rumor has it) a bit of impromptu song and dance to golden oldies while cleaning the kitchen, proving that some Dames rock AND roll! Will we do this again? Re-match, next summer!

The menu reflected the season, with lots of fresh summer vegetables, Mediterranean style, including a cheese selection, with nuts, olives, and figs; heirloom tomato bruschetta; salami horns; sausage, hearts of palm and tomatoes; spinach with peaches and pecans; Caprese salad; quinoa and feta salad; Mediterranean beef tenderloin; tiramisu; and "Awesome" brownies (because there is always room for brownies!).

-Gina Voci

My First Negroni

By Gina Voci 🍷

The first time I tasted a Negroni was in 1956. I was in a state room on the luxury cruise ship, Grace Line, at a bon voyage party for my parents who were moving our family to Aruba, where we would live for the next four years. A roomful of Italian relatives, my uncle tending bar, copious amounts of food, tears of farewell and joy, many kisses and hugs, and me – four years old, wandering around the room, not quite sure what it was all about. I spotted my mom, elegantly dressed in deep rose colored silk, sipping a drink that nearly matched her dress in color, deep red hues with a hint of rich mahogany brown at the edges. It was so pretty, and when she set it down on a glass coffee table, I simply couldn't resist taking a sip. It was not love at first taste. The drink is pure alcohol, not the fruit punch that I had expected, and it was many years before I ventured to pick up an unknown glass of anything after that!

Negroni continued to be the featured cocktail of many of my parents' gatherings over the years. It became a favorite of mine, as well, when I finally acquired an appreciation for the bittersweet aromatic blend. The recipe couldn't be simpler, but the secret to the rich warm color of my first Negroni comes from using Punt e Mes as the vermouth, giving a touch more complexity and less sweetness, just like my uncle made it 59 years ago.



Uncle John's Negroni

Makes 1 drink

1/3 part gin
1/3 part Campari
1/3 part Punt e Mes
1 orange twist

Stir and serve on the rocks or straight up.

Meet your two new board members

By Amelia Levin 🍷

Margaret Laport

If you've ever seen the little winking sun logo on Dulcinea Farm's watermelons, that's artist-at-heart Margaret Laport's work. As a former marketing director for The Perishables Group, a large-scale produce consulting company, Margaret developed the brand identity for many fruit and vegetable suppliers, including Dulcinea Farms, which 15 years later still bears the name and graphics she developed, based on a character from the famous Don Quixote novel.

Now, as the North American marketing director for Botanical Food Company, Margaret relies on her nearly 30 years of experience to lead the marketing and public relations efforts in the U.S. and Canada for Gourmet Garden, the company's line of herb and spice products. Most recently, she has collaborated with chefs and others to develop Gourmet Garden's line of lightly dried herbs like basil, cilantro, parsley and chives. They bring freshness to dishes, using all-natural ingredients, but have a four-week shelf life due to an innovative, patented process.

"It's exciting to work on the culinary aspect to bridge the gap between fresh and dried when it comes to herbs," she said. "There hasn't been anything like this on the market."

A native of Wilmette and graduate of the University of Illinois, Margaret got her start in the food industry during the late 1980s, working for a small, Texas-based sales and promotions agency with clients such as Frito Lay. Moving back to Chicago, she took a job with the National Food Distributors Association, which has since merged into what is now The Specialty Food Association (sponsor of the Fancy Food Show).

Margaret joined Les Dames D'Escoffier Chicago in 2013 through colleague Shannon Kinsella, and has participated in the annual fundraiser, helping to raise sponsorship money and procure food products for the event. She also serves on the scholarship committee, helping select the esteemed group that will receive funding and mentorship through Les Dames.

This year, as a new board member, she hopes to bring her passion and natural "gift" for technology and web development to help make chapter

communications and operations more efficient. Having served on her condo board as treasurer, Margaret also feels comfortable with financial planning. "I love being in Les Dames because I've always been one to promote women in this business, Margaret said. "I feel the food industry — and especially the produce industry — can still be such a man's world."



Kathy Ruff

Kathy Ruff knows how to throw a killer party. As founder of one of the city's most respected event rental companies, Kathy for the past 26 years has coordinated with countless caterers, event planners and brides to host parties of all budgets and sizes, from intimate, beachside dinners to grand galas at Ravinia and Lincoln Park Zoo, large-scale corporate events, and private gatherings for high-profile figures.

After quickly outgrowing her living room, where she first built her rental business (with dishwashing help from the Moody Bible cheerleading squad), she took the leap and opened shop on West Hubbard Street, once a rough area of the city. Since then, several caterers and antique dealers have followed her lead to become not only neighbors, but in some cases, close collaborators. Kathy's warehouse has grown to 40,000 square feet, plus she added a second, 30,000-square-foot location. They hold more than 2,500 items and 50 full-time staff members.

"Cabs used to not even drive into the neighborhood, but now when you walk in, you see this jewel of a showroom and it's such a surprise to people," she said.

As a full-scale rental service, Tablesapes supplies everything from Champagne flutes, pearl caviar spoons, Riedel crystal glasses to trending dinnerware and supplies for caterers and chefs. Kathy also keeps on top of trends in the industry (think: farmhouse chic). Tablesapes has become known for introducing new products to the market.

"Our whole concept is to have rental pieces that don't look rented," she says. "We always try to push the edge and look at things differently." Most recently, the company has expanded its full carpentry, paint and welding shop to design and build its own line of furniture.

Kathy joined Les Dames 20 years ago through the late Myra Gotoff, a respected caterer. She has since donated countless products for various events, including the annual fundraising gala. This year, she's excited to serve as a new board member. "Les Dames has been great as far as making new friends and even customers," said Kathy, who hopes her party-planning expertise can help develop fun opportunities for socializing and networking.



Summer pleasures: Chicago Dames read, roll and ... eat (continued)



| RAVINIA : The Ravinia Poluck Picnic on August 9 featured a Mediterranean cheese platter, grilled chicken kabobs, and many salads



| RAVINIA : Julie and Josh Chernoff enjoy the evening (above)

| RAVINIA : Gabriel Pereira and Mary Abbott Hess enjoy the evening's jazz (below)



| RAVINIA: Mary McMahon, Sharon Olson, and Karen Levin enjoy the delicious spread (above).



| BOCCE : The bocce-ball winner's circle: Toria Emas, Gina Voci, Jeanne McInerney Lubeck, and Rita Gutekanst (above).



| RAVINIA : At Ravinia, Toria Emas and Roberta Miller eat dessert al fresco on the Great Lawn above

| BOCCE : Mary Kay Gill brought her fig appetizer to the bocce ball event (below).



| RAVINIA : Sharon and Fred Olson enjoy the evening (below).



| DAMES WHO READ : Author Judith Fertig toasts Les Dames book group members



| DAMES WHO READ : Cakes and cookies were prepared from The Cake Therapist recipes.



| RAVINIA : Mediterranean spreads, dips and breads share the table with Ottolenghi chicken (left)



| DAMES WHO READ : Judith Fertig enjoys rainbow cake at Nina Barrett's Bookends & Beginnings

| RAVINIA : (from left, below) Phaedra Ruffalo, Mary McMahon and Laura Parsons break bread together



Panache Contributors

Editor: Carol Mighton Haddix

Contributing Editors: Judith Dunbar Hines, Amelia Levin, Karen Levin, Gina Voci

Design: Flora Caputo

Printing: Folio Press

Distribution: Eleanor Hanson

© 2015 Les Dames d'Escoffier Chicago

