Les Dames d’Escoffier women thrive in the culinary industry

By CYNTHIA SCHUSTER EAKIN

Les Dames d’Escoffier International is an organization of women helping women to succeed and grow in the highly competitive, male-dominated culinary industry.

“Les Dames d’Escoffier International (LDEI) is a philanthropic organization of women leaders in the fields of food, fine beverage and hospitality. The invitation membership, composed of more than 2,400 members in 43 chapters in the United States, Canada, and five countries in the United Kingdom, France and Mexico, is highly diversified and reflects the multifaceted fields of contemporary gastronomy and hospitality,” LDEI Cleveland President Beth Davis-Noragon said.

“LDEI, as a whole, is unique for its inclusive focus on women and for the mechanisms it provides for women to support women in the male-dominated industries. One chapter is part of the international network of women’s leadership organizations,” she added.

“The Cleveland chapter of LDEI was founded in 2004, so we just celebrated our 15th year! I will always remember attending one of the first meetings at Dame Karen Stim’s Flying Pig restaurant with my infant daughter in tow to find out more about this organization of ‘women in the culinary field.’ That description is only the tip of the iceberg,” Davis-Noragon said. “I remain attracted by not only the network of leaders in all fields around hospitality, with everyone from food stylists to cookbook authors, in addition to higher profile chefs, but also by the spirit of mentorship and cooperation that exists at the local and national levels.”

Bev Shaffer, a past LDEI Cleveland president, now leads the international organization as board president. “I have been a longtime member of other culinary and leadership organizations and was a founding member of the Cleveland chapter,” she said. “What attracted me to LDEI is its emphasis on professional women with eclectic culinary backgrounds.”

“Especially on a chapter by chapter level, we create a supportive culture within our communities through philanthropy and by supporting excellence in the culinary fields that include, but are not limited to farming, beverage, food and hospitality,” Shaffer noted. “The LDEI International board just completed a three-year strategic plan and updated our guiding principles. We are committed to lifelong learning, mentoring, career advancement and professional development for our members.”

Davis-Noragon added, “Membership in LDEI is by invitation only and is limited to women with at least five years of professional experience in the food, beverage or hospitality industries. ‘Our chapter admits new members twice each year, in March and August. The March membership application deadline for 2020 has passed, but new rounds of applications will be accepted between May 25 and June 5, 2020. A formal induction ceremony is held for all new members at our annual meeting in September,” Davis-Noragon stated.

The Cleveland chapter holds six meetings a year, all of which are open to the public except the annual membership meeting. “We look at each meeting as an opportunity to learn and explore areas of interest that are foodrelated,” she said.

SummerDine, a fundraiser for the scholarship and grant programs, takes place simultaneously at restaurants across the area on the third Wednesday in August. This year’s date is Aug. 19, 2020. Local restaurants donate between two and 10 seats at a common table, and guests may purchase however many of those seats as they wish. For a price of $80, the restaurant provides a special menu of several courses highlighting both the restaurant and the season’s bounty. A cocktail or glass of wine is also provided, with additional beverages available for purchase. In many cases, the chef will speak to the guests about the menu and Dames in attendance will speak about the year’s grant and scholarship winners. Participating restaurants have included Ditore, Palaiko, Flying Pig, La Campana, Jai, McCracken’s and many others. Visit www.clevelandldei.org for additional information about SummerDine.

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