

Golden Pineapple Awards

CELEBRATE WOMEN, SUCCESS



by LEIGH CORT

The Womens Food Alliance (WFA) has a well-defined mission of cultivating and advancing education, collaboration and networking for women in the culinary and hospitality industry throughout Florida and Southeast Georgia. When it was launched in 2013 by founder Leigh Cort, she realized that the hospitality industry was exploding with talented, creative and passionate women in careers that revolved in and around food, beverage, events and travel. The original goals of this escalating organization still prevail with the addition of another dimension: The Golden Pineapple Hospitality Award.



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE WOMENS FOOD ALLIANCE
Pictured from left: Liz Earnest, Cindy Stavely, Amy Morales, Dee Ann Hobbs, Aine Culhane, Dawn Hutchins, Sharlay Smith, Nicole Chapman, Lauren Titus and Kelly Mabry — all winners.

Enjoy learning about a few ladies and their businesses!

Why the 'Golden Pineapple'?

Over centuries, the pineapple has predominantly been used as a symbol of hospitality. There are several other symbolic meanings associated with the succulent fruit. In early European society, pineapples were a symbol of status, since they couldn't be grown on European soil. So only the affluent could afford to import them — and also use the beautiful fruit as decorative elements in dinner parties that reflected the host's wealth. They were also hung on doorways as a symbol of friendship.

As the WFA has been exploring different cultural cuisines, attending new product food tastings, gathering for distinctive dinners and luncheons to meet noted culinary celebrities and enjoying culinary competitions, the growing excitement has included the first and second annual Golden Pineapple Hospitality Award Dinners.

Today, the Womens Food Alliance is a high-energy group of women all with a common interest — possessing a strong belief in how they can support and help each other. The monthly events are a gathering place to engage, relax and unwind, while keeping up with members' businesses and gathering information for their own careers. The surprise event in the past two years has been the announcement of the Golden Pineapple winners.

At the second annual Award Dinner that took place at Deerwood Country Club, each of the 10 winners were introduced by a poem that was read about each nominee.

WINNER: Sharlay Smith

The creator of 'The Lentil House' garnered her the Creative Business Architect prize:

The humble tiny lentil has finally found its way — to be honored & eaten with gusto every day

Sharlay Smith's Lentil House shares her story — Nat'l recognition gives each lentil the glory.

Winning the Good Food Award as an alternative snack — it's easy to tuck away in any back pack.

We cheer you Sharlay for flavors like rosemary, smoked paprika and lime — Let's eat healthier — one little lentil at a time.

WINNER: Liz Earnest

The founder of The Chef's Garden Catering, received the Hospitality Lifetime Legend prize:

A lifetime of stunning parties can thank their lucky star — Liz Earnest has been catering since she created how to raise the bar

Her avocation of food and events went quickly into serious — Chef's Garden Catering must have made her delirious

Winning prominence in Jacksonville for decades at a time — creative, gracious catering with a sprinkling of sublime.

Daughter Jen shares the stage making new dreams come true — WFA is honored to call you friend and have a member like you!

WINNER: Aine Culhane

The partner in Culhane's Irish Pub and recipient of Legendary Restaurant Pioneer:

With her Irish sisters she's hard to tame — at the Culhane's bar, well that's another game.



Golden Pineapple jewelry.

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PINEAPPLE

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Coming to America to launch and keep it going — Aine Culhane's expertise is in the knowing

Her resilience and warmth with guests she's SO engaging — big sport parties she's adept at staging

This Irish Goddess full of lilt and laughter — her beauty and 'sass' you'll never forget — long after!

WINNER: Dawn Hutchins

The creator of Vege-Cooking and winner of Rising Gold Star: Vege-cooking is important to so many today — improving health and learning the easy way

Dawn Hutchins' the coach we need — A dynamic entrepreneur climbing the ladder to succeed!

Empowering families with tools for a lifetime of fun and healthy eating —

In her purpose-driven business — she's a strong advocate who doesn't believe in defeating!

The knowledge, hard work, respect and fellowship that members share leads everyone to believe that more women in the industry could benefit from and contribute to the Womens Food Alliance. WFA plans at least 12-18 programs each year that take place in inspiring locations throughout the area, showcasing members' venues.

The Spirituality of Pineapple

Somehow, many of the Womens Food Alliance members have a spiritual connection to the pineapple, a symbol of prosperity — which is always accompanied by cheers and celebrations.

To the Native Americans, it's a sign that the land will yield more produce — and great abundance will come soon. As a symbol of luxury, nobility and wealth throughout Europe, a single pineapple could fetch a fortune. Thus, the host who was able to present freshly cut pineapple to guests — was the one with money, power and connections.

It's so appropriate that the pineapple, an object of wisdom, helps one to get wiser — showing how to navigate the way through seemingly impossible situations and circumstances. Without question, the relationships born out of participation in Womens Food Alliance reflect many of the tenets that make the Golden Pineapple more meaningful than just the award dinner. It's now become the WFA mantra!

Learn more at womensfoodalliance.com.



The 2022 WFA Advisory Council, pictured from left, are Kelly Mabry, Cindy Stavely, Amy Morales, Nancy Guarnieri, Terri Sherman, Nancy Slatsky, Leigh Cort, Faye Lance and Betsi Hill.