

# HOSPITALITY, FOODIE TALENT SPRAWLS FROM ST. AUGUSTINE TO SAVANNAH

story and photos by  
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**T**he Women’s Food Alliance, which was launched — and once identified only — in Northeast Florida, is practically ignoring the state borderline between Florida and Georgia and is now becoming the Women’s Food Alliance in the Southeast.

This was obvious in late September when two WFA events took place for members, one in St. Simons Island and another in Jacksonville.

It took 10 years for the Northeast Florida organization to grow into 150 hospitality members primarily established in Duval and St. Johns counties. The Coastal Georgia expansion began in June and has now grown to 25+ members from St. Marys and St. Simons to Savannah, Georgia.

What is the common denominator between these two states rich with hard-working, creative, talented and courageous women?

The members eagerly look forward to the monthly (sometimes weekly) events that are created just for them to get together over dinners, lunches, receptions and unique special events. What develops are new business partnerships, trusting relationships,



Jen Goodrich

curiosity about how to mentor and work together — but mostly remembering in their chosen careers — it’s “friendship first”!

Kicking off the fall season at Georgia Sea Grill restaurant in St. Simons Island were 18 new members, all with different businesses and career paths. Chef and cookbook author Rebekah Lingenfelsler (Savannah) did a book signing just prior to the evening dinner at Donna MacPherson’s Golden Isles Culinary Center. They met through the Women’s Food Alliance in 2022 and are now on the leadership board in the coastal Georgia region.

Coming to the island dinner from hours away from the coast and comparing notes about their specialty foods, Cindy Epps (owner of Cindy’s Bits & Pieces Shortbreads) and Ruthie Garner (creator of Ruthie’s Best Butterscotch Sauce) told stories about how they market their products and how they’re handling the growth of their businesses.

The magic of four hospitality/event women meeting for the first time couldn’t have been more fun for Christina Godwin (Christina’s Dance World), Apryl Boyce (FreshJax), Shasta Fahs (Village Creek Landing) and Dale Potts (Sugar Marsh Cottage). Who knows what will be created when they reveal their careers focusing on dance events, seasoning and spice business, marsh side special event space and a confectionery of fine chocolates!

With the proximity of coastal Georgia to Northeast Florida, it wasn’t surprising that two new Women’s Food Alliance members from Florida, who recently met in August, drove to the Georgia dinner. Even though Amanda Axelrod (Happy Bake Day Show) and Erin Ward (The Copy Write Girl) are in dissimilar businesses, they are now good friends who found a

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Rebekah Lingenfelsler, left, and Donna MacPherson



Erin Ward, left, and Amanda Axelrod



Erin Kelly, left, and Cindy Stavely



Clockwise: Michelle, Aine, Lynda and Mary Jane Culhane



Cindy Epps, left, and Ruthie Garner



Pictured from left: Apryl Boyce, Silvia Pulido, Kim Cornwell, Lisa Kiral and Jen Wolcott



Pictured from left: Christina Godwin, Apryl Boyce, Shasta Fahs and Dale Potts

## FOODIE

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great connection over their passions for food and being creative entrepreneurs.

What better North Florida venue to launch the fall and holiday season for members, guests and the amazing 11 new members during the last six weeks?

A very popular restaurant that is conveniently located midway between the members from St. Augustine to Amelia Island: Culhane's Irish Pub on Southside. Representing the ultimate American dream, the four Culhane sisters have become nationally recognized restaurateurs and iconic members of the Women's Food Alliance.

Keeping with tradition, each month finds the Women's Food Alliance showcasing members and their businesses while enjoying a themed event. So an Ireland-inspired evening with videos and photos of the Culhane sisters' native Limerick, Irish countryside, family and a bagpipe welcome and farewell launched the dinner party!

Welcoming members and guests on this particular evening, nobody could have spread cheer better than two valued members of the North Florida



Evelyn Toro of Toro Things Photography

Advisory Board, Erin Kelly (Kelly Farms) and Cindy Stavely (Pirate Museum and Colonial Quarter). They balance their careers with leadership positions in many organizations yet always have time to inspire other women with their professional and positive personalities.

When a new member joins the Women's Food Alliance and says, "Yes, I'd love to showcase my new business," who could resist inviting Jen Goodrich to provide dessert with her irresistible "Peace Love and Little Donuts," which recently opened in St. Augustine!

Once again, the immediate connection

from one hospitality woman to another is obvious whenever there is an opportunity to get together and celebrate the joy of being in the industry everyone has chosen. Silvia Pulido (a 30-year restaurant legend who owns Havana Jax & Cuba Libre), Kim Cornwell (a national event planner owning 50 Shades of Fun), Lisa Kiral (the ReThreaded culinary director) and Jen Wolcott (a leader in the party rental industry All About Events)

Capturing priceless moments at any gathering might be considered one of the most important segments of an event. The Women's Food Alliance welcomes every food, event, entertainment and hospitality businesswoman, all coming together to create life's cherished times together.

As the months turn into years of finding friendships that could last a lifetime, the Women's Food Alliance continues to explode with talent, creativity and passion.

The knowledge, hard work, respect and fellowship that we all share leads us to keep the door open to women who might benefit from and contribute to our organization. Each member offers something unique and it's an exciting journey that we enjoy sharing.