

# Women in food have a lot on their plate.

*W*hat would a chocolatier, an organic farmer, and a Bed and Breakfast owner have in common?

In the autumn of 2013, Travel and Culinary Journalist Leigh Cort accomplished her mission to bring women in food together to discover their common grounds and capitalize on their collective talents.

Cort founded Womens Food Alliance (WFA), an organization that's cultivating and advancing networking, educational opportunities, and fun events for Coastal Georgia and Northeast Florida's women in the food industry. Cort said that women in the culinary industry share many of the same challenges but often bring new insight to each other—insight gleaned from personal and professional experiences over the years.

According to Cort, the food and hospitality industry in Southeast Georgia and Northeast Florida is exploding with female talent, creativity, and passion. Cort is especially credentialed in recognizing talent, creativity, and passion.

Considered by her peers to be a visionary, Cort is no newcomer to the hospitality industry. Her personal path propelled her through 25 years of climbing to the top in numerous arenas. As Party Director for New York City's distinguished Trump Tower during the 1980s, Leigh produced and promoted galas for the international rich and

famous. She became The Party Doctor soon after, writing and appearing on Lifetime TV for Nabisco. Then under the watchful eye of Vincent Sardi, she entertained the famous show-biz crowd in

Manhattan's renowned Sardi's. Her next project, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel on Amelia Island, filled the ensuing years with special events designed for international guests and celebrities.

"I had been developing the concept for an

*continued ...*



**Leigh Cort**  
Founder of  
Womens Food Alliance



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educational plus fun women's organization for years," Cort said. "The growth of the Womens Food Alliance is rewarding and amazing!"

Beginning with a pre-launch invitation to eight women Leigh respected and admired for their business diversity, the embryonic group met for dinner as the WFA "Advisory Committee"

Within three months, the membership had reached fifty. Geographically spanning from St. Simons Island to St. Augustine, members are sharing their businesses while participating in dinners, food focus groups, educational seminars, chef demonstrations, rib-eating competitions, chocolate tastings & tempering, and other events on a monthly basis.



***Chocolate Tasting & Tempering  
at Peterbrooke Chocolatier***

*L to R Front row: Rebekah Lowry, Tammy Poudrier,  
Sherry Stoppelbein, Mariela Grosbell  
Back row: Benedetta Dubetz, Leigh Cort, Donna Harden,  
Belinda Hulin, Jennifer Price-Easterling*

Marian Aiksnoras, creator of Bloody Amazing Seasoning from St. Simons Island, said "Becoming a member of the WFA is invaluable to my business. It affords networking connections that are priceless. I have the ability to gain wisdom and practical knowledge from an exceptional group of women."

Exceptional is a key word for members of WFA. With an impressive membership roster that runs from restaurateurs to hospitality instructors to cookbook authors, WFA is a magnet for achievers and believers.

"The diversity of WFA gives me amazing insights that fuel my writing," said cookbook author and food writer Belinda Hulin. "Not only do we have women from all ages and backgrounds coming together, but we also have every aspect of the food, beverage and hospitality industry represented. That's a powerful resource, and we're all there to support one another."

Through WFA, women who already have a lot on their plate are bringing much to the food industry table and, in turn, are being empowered to do more for their own businesses as they brainstorm with other members to achieve excellence.

Cort invites all area women who work in the food, beverage, or hospitality industry to get involved in WFA. Visit [www.WomensFoodAlliance.com](http://www.WomensFoodAlliance.com), or call 904-806-3613. ■