

New Food Alliance Chapter Brings Business Leaders Together in Lake County

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Women in the food and hospitality industry gathered April 21 at Mission Resort + Club in Howey-in-the-Hills for the launch of the Women's Food Alliance Lake County regional chapter.

The event brought together professionals across a wide range of careers, including chefs, restaurateurs, event planners, farmers, bakers and more, all with a shared focus on connection and collaboration within the industry.



Founded in 2013, the Women's Food Alliance began in Northeast Florida and has since expanded, creating opportunities for women in hospitality to build relationships, share resources and support one another. The new Lake County chapter will host monthly gatherings at member-owned, including dinners, receptions and lunches throughout the region.

"The Women's Food Alliance plays a pivotal role in shaping the hospitality industry's future as we nurture our members who are ready to thrive," says founder Leigh Cull. "Through encouragement and mentorship, we chart a course where every woman is inspired for success."

Leadership for the Central Florida region includes Sheena Willis of Orange Blossom Market Co. in Clewiston, Cindy Staley of Mission Resort + Club, Anne Urban of Jacksonville Wedding Supplies and Beth Hill, a hospitality journalist and author.

"What I love most about the Women's Food Alliance is how deeply it's rooted in local connection," says Sheena. "It brings together women across the hospitality industry who are shaping the culture of our community and creating a space where that work is truly seen and celebrated."



Leigh began the alliance to foster a supportive "sorority" of members whose diversity of cultures and careers is an open door to friendship and celebration.

"Each month we create a gathering place to engage, support and discover," she says.

Attendees described the event as both productive and personal, with connections forming quickly across industries.

For some, those connections were immediate.

"I went to the Women's Food Alliance dinner to network and make connections with other like-minded women in the hospitality industry," says Melissa McCracken, owner of McCracken's Irish Pub in Leesburg. "The night was an absolute success because I made an immediate connection with Poppin' Box owner Rebecca Turner. It was true providence."

Melissa says the connection quickly turned into an unexpected business transaction and a new friendship.

"I ordered beer cheese popcorn for next day delivery to eat at Leesburg Bikesafe," she says. "The box arrived, and I couldn't believe it. The delicious popcorn was an absolute hit."

Photos: Gina Horan and provided

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About the Author: Gina Horan. She moved to Central Florida in August 2022 from the San Francisco Bay Area. She has a degree in Linguistics and worked as a travel editor until 2019. She is currently a writer for the right. Her hobbies include reading, travel, and photography. She is also a member of the Lake County Women's Food Alliance.

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