



Les Dames d'Escoffier | Austin Chapter

Celebrating Women of Culinary Achievement and Creating Paths for Those to Come

TEN AUSTIN WOMEN RECEIVE GRANTS TO FURTHER THEIR CULINARY CAREERS FROM LES DAMES D'ESCOFFIER AUSTIN CHAPTER

AUSTIN, TX (May 5, 2022) - The Austin chapter of Les Dames d'Escoffier, an international culinary leadership organization of women, has awarded \$24,000 in scholarships, professional development stipends and grants to 10 Central Texas women. Since 2003 the Austin chapter has given \$217,000 in scholarships and culinary stipends. These funds support the growth of careers and ongoing studies for women in hospitality, culinary and beverage.

This is the first year the Austin chapter has awarded the Michelle Lee Memorial Scholarship, named in honor of their friend and Les Dames member who passed away in 2021. Michelle Soojee Lee was a quiet force on the Austin culinary scene. The Michelle Lee Memorial Scholarship is for the female candidate in the culinary/hospitality/grocery industry who is guided by the greater good and isn't afraid to hustle. She is an under-represented BIPOC culinarian or an advocate of the greater advancement of equality and human rights.

"The amount of talent and drive from women in our industry in Central Texas is staggering," said Ha Lam, scholarship chair for Les Dames Austin chapter. "We had a number of well-deserved applicants this year - women with creative ideas on not only how to help themselves or their businesses, but also how to teach and give back to the community around them. That kind of selflessness is truly inspirational."

This year's scholarships and grants winners include:

Culinary School

- Merisauh Gamble, a student in pastry arts at Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts, will use her \$4,000 scholarship toward her ongoing studies.

'A la Carte' Stipend

- Kimberly Zash, head roaster at Greater Goods Coffee and co-founder of Sightseer, will receive \$4,000 to join the Coffee Roaster's Guild, attend the SCA Specialty Coffee Expo Conference in Boston and work toward her Q Grader Certification.
- Casie Wiginton, beverage buyer at Antonelli's Cheese, will receive \$2,000 to study and take her WSET exams and create a wine education program for her team.

Culinary Professional

- Angel Young, an externship student in culinary arts at Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts, will use her \$2,000 toward supporting her studies and career.
- Celia Bell, operations manager at Two Hives Honey, receives \$2,000 to take a class from the American Honey Tasting Society and work toward her Texas Master Beekeeping Certification.

Beverage

- Aswini Sivasamy, founder and owner of Sesa, will reinstate and complete certifications for her products in order to reach direct and wholesale customers.
- Naijean Bernard, PhD, is a psychologist-turned-beverage entrepreneur. With her \$2,000 scholarship, she will expand the reach for Jeany's Caribbean Elixirs by finding a co-packing partner and expand into specialty grocery stores.

Travel

- Aurora Torado, one of the lead pastry chefs at Emmer & Rye Hospitality, will use her \$2,000 grant to travel to the Chicago Chocolate Academy to take courses and explore opening a small bakery.
- Chi Ndika, founder and CEO of Luv Fats ice cream, a small batch dairy-free ice cream company, will travel to the west coast and Puerto Rico to explore new flavor profiles and business models.

Michelle Lee Memorial Scholarship

- Michelle Hall is the first winner of the Michelle Lee Memorial Scholarship. A trained pastry chef who has worked for numerous award-winning restaurants, she is now a pastry chef instructor at the Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts. She will use her \$2,000 scholarship to upgrade her equipment and source products to better provide for her students.

To date, the Austin chapter has awarded more than \$217,000 in scholarships, continuing education stipends and community grants.

In addition to providing scholarships, the Austin Chapter of Les Dames d'Escoffier hosts education, mentoring and networking events for both members and non-members, supports local philanthropic initiatives such as its annual holiday dinner for the homeless, and provides weekly "food runs" to reduce food waste in the community.

Its largest fundraiser of the year, You Grill Girl!, occurred last week at Franklin BBQ.

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ABOUT LES DAMES D'ESCOFFIER

Les Dames d'Escoffier International is a philanthropic society consisting of 2,500 professional women leaders in the fields of food, fine beverage, and hospitality from 43 chapters across the globe. We are dedicated to education and volunteering. We educate on culinary excellence and entrepreneurship. We serve our communities through various philanthropic efforts and programs. The Austin Chapter consists of 110 members from all areas of the culinary community. Since 2003, we have given \$217,000 in scholarships and culinary stipends to students and professionals seeking further education. We envision a world where all people appreciate and value the work and contribution of women in our industry, where women support women, and where communities create meaningful impact through serving our community. Les Dames Austin is a local chapter of the nonprofit Les Dames d'Escoffier International (LDEI). For more information about Les Dames d'Escoffier of Austin, please visit <https://www.ldeiaustin.org/>.