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APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN FOR LDEI 2026 LEGACY AWARDS

Les Dames d'Escoffier International Announces Immersive, Career-Advancing Experiences for Women in Food, Beverage, and Hospitality

New York, NY – January 26, 2026 – [Les Dames d'Escoffier International \(LDEI\)](#) is pleased to announce that applications are now open for the 2026 LDEI Legacy Awards, supported by [The Julia Child Foundation for Gastronomy and the Culinary Arts](#). Since 2009, the Legacy Awards provide women in food, beverage, and hospitality with transformative, one-of-a-kind professional experiences designed to accelerate careers, expand networks, and deepen leadership skills.

The 2026 Legacy Awards feature six immersive experiences hosted by accomplished LDEI members and partners across the U.S. and abroad. Each award is thoughtfully curated to offer hands-on learning, mentorship, and real-world insight into the systems shaping today's food landscape — from regenerative agriculture and restaurant ownership to spirits branding, sustainable food systems, and product innovation. Applications are open now through March 31, 2026.

“Legacy Awards are about meaningful access to knowledge, to mentors, and to experiences that women don't always get invited into,” said Marilyn Freundlich,



Left to Right (clockwise): Atlanta Chapter, Portland Chapter, London Chapter, Boston Chapter

President of Les Dames d'Escoffier International. "The 2026 programs reflect the depth and diversity of our membership and the power of learning directly from women who are building resilient, values-driven food businesses and systems."

2026 LDEI Legacy Award Experiences

Vertically Integrated Farming: Pasture to Plate – Atlanta Chapter

Hosted in partnership with White Oak Pastures near Bluffton, Georgia, this experience offers an in-depth look at a sixth-generation, zero-waste farm that pasture-raises, processes, and prepares its own livestock. The Awardee will gain exposure to each step of production, from animal husbandry and USDA-inspected processing to food service operations. The experience concludes in Atlanta with Global Growers Network, exploring urban agriculture and culturally rooted food systems serving diverse communities.

Restaurant Ownership & Hospitality – Boston Chapter

Designed for an emerging restaurateur, this experience offers a behind-the-scenes look at independent restaurant ownership. Hosted by the Boston Chapter Dames, the Awardee will receive mentorship from award-winning chefs and restaurateurs, including Tracy Chang (Pagu), Patricia Estorino (Gustazo Cuban Kitchen), and Maria Freddura (The Daily Catch). Programming includes business planning, kitchen design, supply sourcing, and marketing, culminating in guidance on drafting a restaurant business plan.

Roots & Revenue: Big Island Agriculture – Hawai'i Chapter

Tailored to the Awardee's interests, this experience explores the development, marketing, and distribution of value-added agricultural products on the Big Island of Hawai'i. With visits to farms, ranches, markets, and school garden programs, the Awardee will learn how producers build multiple revenue streams while strengthening local food systems in a region where most food is imported. Accommodations will be in Waimea, immersed in Hawai'i's agricultural heartland.

Kentucky Spirits: Grain to Glass – Kentucky Chapter

This five-day experience focuses on the business, branding, and production of bourbon. Hosted by the Kentucky Dames, the Awardee will engage with distillers, brand founders, blenders, and cooperage experts to understand everything from mash bills and barrel aging to visitor experiences and brand growth. Highlights include mentorship with leaders at Buzzard's Roost and hospitality at Foxhollow Farm.

Harvesting Knowledge: Sustainable Food Systems – London Chapter

Hosted by the London Chapter Dames in collaboration with Ballymaloe Cookery School and Organic Farm in Ireland, this experience includes participation in Ballymaloe's "Week of Practical Homesteading." Led by Dame Darina Allen, the program focuses on regenerative farming, traditional food skills, and food sovereignty. The experience concludes in London with curated visits to artisan producers and conversations with chapter Dames.

Food Production Innovation: Concept to Shelf – Portland Chapter

This experience explores how women bring artisan food products to market. Over five days, the Awardee

will meet women-owned brands at various stages of growth, tour production facilities, and learn how branding, scaling, and distribution shape success. Hosted by the Portland Chapter Dames, the program includes mentorship from established founders and past LDEI scholarship recipients.

“LDEI’s Legacy Awards embody Julia Child’s lifelong commitment to learning, mentorship, and excellence in the culinary arts,” said Todd Schulkin, Executive Director for The Julia Child Foundation for Gastronomy and the Culinary Arts. “We’re honored to support programs that give women the tools, confidence, and access to lead the future of food.”

Application forms are online [here](#). Legacy Award Committee Co-Chairs are Dame Bonnie Tandy Leblang of New York, Dame Ingrid Gangestad of Florida, and Dame Beth Pav of Austin. The awards are supported by Les Dames D’Escoffier International, LDEI chapters, individual members, their companies, and The Julia Child Foundation for Gastronomy and Culinary Arts. For more information on the LDEI Legacy Awards and to meet last year’s winners, click [here](#).

Each LDEI Legacy Award includes a five-day immersive experience working alongside accomplished LDEI members. Experiences may take place as early as June and as late as mid-October 2026.

The Legacy Awards are open to women residing in the United States, Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, or Italy. Applicants must have a minimum of four years of professional experience in food, beverage, hospitality, or related fields (including agriculture and farming) and may apply to only one award category. Awardees will be notified in May 2026.

About Les Dames d’Escoffier International

Les Dames is an international organization of women leaders who create a supportive culture in their communities to achieve excellence in the fields of food, beverage, and hospitality. The organization’s 2,800 members in 40 chapters in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and Italy provide leadership, educational opportunities, and philanthropy. Since its incorporation in 1988, Les Dames chapters have raised and donated more than \$10 million to educational, community non-profits, and philanthropic organizations. For more information, visit www.ldei.org and follow Les Dames on Instagram [@lesdamesintl](#) and Facebook [@Les Dames d'Escoffier Int'l](#).