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Les Dames d'Escoffier International Announces Winners of Inaugural Chapter Awards at 2026 Annual Conference

New recognition program celebrates the collective impact of women leaders across food, beverage, and hospitality

NEW YORK, NY — [Les Dames d'Escoffier International](#) (LDEI) proudly announced the winners of its first-ever LDEI Chapter Awards during the organization's Annual Conference in April 2026. The new program recognizes the extraordinary collective achievements of LDEI chapters around the world, highlighting initiatives that advance mentorship, philanthropy, leadership, and community engagement across the food, beverage, and hospitality industries.

The inaugural awards celebrate chapters whose work exemplifies the spirit of collaboration and service that defines LDEI's global network of women leaders. The categories include the Philanthropic Powerhouse Award, the Showstopper Award, the Impactful Change Award, and the Power of Connection Award. Category winners are invited to take part in a special LDEI Live Online session on May 5, 2026, where they'll share their work and success. The winning chapters will be awarded with prizes from Tito's Handmade Vodka, a longtime LDEI philanthropic partner, to celebrate.

“Our chapters are the heartbeat of LDEI,” said Marilyn Freundlich, President of Les Dames d’Escoffier International. “These awards recognize the remarkable collective power of our members—women who come together to support their communities, mentor the next generation, and create meaningful change through food, hospitality, and philanthropy.”

The Chapter Awards were created to elevate the initiatives that define LDEI’s mission, empowering women in culinary, beverage, and hospitality careers through education, mentorship, and philanthropy. Submissions were assessed by a committee against criteria matching LDEI’s greater mission and values.

2026 LDEI Chapter Award Winners

The Philanthropic Powerhouse Award

Winner: Greater Des Moines Chapter

The Greater Des Moines chapter was recognized for its outstanding commitment to community service and philanthropy. Despite being a smaller Midwest chapter, members dedicate significant time and resources to supporting local organizations through quarterly outreach initiatives, partnerships with groups such as Meals on Wheels and the Breakfast Club, and their annual Wine & Pie fundraiser. This year’s fundraiser saw 79% member participation and more than 500 collective volunteer hours, with members contributing through baking, marketing, sponsorship outreach, logistics, and community engagement.

The chapter also recently launched a new food security initiative by funding and installing a community refrigerator in an area that had lost access to one. In partnership with a local Dame-owned business and building owner, the project includes ongoing chapter support for maintenance, cleaning, and food stocking throughout the year.

The Showstopper Award

Winner: Birmingham Chapter

The Birmingham chapter earned recognition for one of its signature fundraising events: Champagne & Fried Chicken. What began as a pandemic-era drive-through event has evolved into one of Birmingham’s most anticipated annual gatherings. Guests now enjoy a lively street picnic at Pepper Place featuring live

music, cocktails, fried chicken, champagne, and locally grown flowers, with both dine-in and drive-through options.

C&FC is one of many events that play a key role in enabling the chapter to award more than \$250,000 in grants and scholarships, including \$47,000 in 2025 alone, while strengthening partnerships with organizations such as the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama.



Birmingham Chapter & Des

The Cultivating Impactful Change Award

Winner: Kansas City Chapter

The Kansas City chapter was honored for its rapidly growing scholarship and mentorship initiative supporting women pursuing careers in culinary arts, food science, hospitality, and entrepreneurship. Since launching in 2018 with just two scholarships, the program has expanded to 14 scholarships totaling \$39,000 in 2025, with a \$50,000 commitment planned for 2026. In addition to financial support, recipients gain mentorship from a network of more than 60 industry professionals.

The program has demonstrated measurable impact, with 100% of scholarship recipients remaining in school or working in related industries, and many advancing into leadership roles, launching businesses, or earning professional certifications.

The Power of Connection Award

Winner: St. Louis Chapter

This award recognizes the chapter with the highest percentage of members attending the 2026 LDEI Annual Conference, celebrating engagement, collaboration, and the strength of the organization's global network.

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About Les Dames d'Escoffier International

LDEI 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 42 chapters in the U.S., Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and Italy provide leadership, educational opportunities, and philanthropy. Since its founding in 1985, LDEI 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 LDEI on Instagram @lesdamesintl and Facebook @LDEIdamesdescoffier.