

PANACHE

Newsletter of Les Dames d'Escoffier Chicago

Philadelphia Story

Inspire & Energize: Les Dames d'Escoffier International Conference

By Sharon Olson

Les Dames members returned to Philadelphia after 25 years for the 2009 annual conference held October 1-4 at the Sofitel. The experience delivered on the promise of inspiration and energy with tours showcasing the city's rich history of food, culture and the arts.

Dr. Marion Nestle, New York University professor, author, and self-described "food warrior," was the keynote speaker and shared her opinions with an enthusiastic audience. Her passionate discourse incited many discussions long after her presentation.

The Green Tables breakfast featured farmer Dames who shared their joys and challenges. And individual Chapters shared their stories about Green Tables initiatives making a positive difference around the country. The Chicago Chapter's program was described as "ambitious," and it inspired members to keep the momentum going.

Linda Etherton of Ketchum Global Food and Nutrition Practice Group shared a glimpse into the future of food. A survey of 1,000 consumers from 5 countries—China, Argentina, Germany, the UK and the US—provided perspective on commonalities and differences in the consumer's relationship with food worldwide. Health, nourishment, and family were important aspects of food common to all cultures. Clean, drinkable water and healthier, more affordable food topped everyone's lists when consumers were asked about priorities. Chinese consumers considered food the key to health. In Argentina, family played the largest role in food culture. German and UK consumers ranked enjoyment highest, and Americans were most into culinary adventure and the experience of food.

This global survey of consumers registered a plea for foods with simple ingredient statements. When asked about food labeling, consumers had the following feedback:

- 63% said they want to recognize all of the ingredients on a label
- 41% believed food should be simple without a lot of additives
- 34% said food should be made with as few ingredients as possible
- Over 40% of consumers said they would not buy affordable, good tasting food without knowing where it came from
- 52% want uniform global nutrient labeling

The Politics of Food was a large part of the conversation both on stage and around town at this year's conference, and a meeting of the food industry's opinion leaders would not be complete without a few new buzz words to inspire conversations. This year's favorites included:

"Foodidiot"—a consumer with so much passion for information about various aspects of food and nutrition that they become virtually paralyzed with information overload. US and UK consumers were noted as those with the most voracious appetite for information.



Top row: Dames Karen Levin, Sharon Olson, Brenda McDowell, Veronica Hastings, Diane Sokolowski; Bottom row: Dames Ina Pinkney, Nancy Brussat, Toria (Betsy Ross) Emas, Eleanor Hanson

"Food Value Index"—a concept rather

than an actual equation that would allow consumers to assess the various characteristics they find important when purchasing food and create their own index.

"Impact Accountability"—assessment of the impact on individual communities related to the delivery of foods including carbon footprint and beyond.

The nine attendees from the Chicago chapter agreed that historic Philadelphia was a cool setting for the 2009 conference, and look forward to turning up the heat next year, when the Palm Springs CA chapter will host the annual conference on October 21-24, 2010.