

Summer PARTIES

JUST NEED GREAT GUESTS



by LEIGH CORT

The informality of entertaining at home today, with occasional guests from around the globe making reservations at your home to stay for a while and get the Florida sand in their shoes, creates a mood that is casual and inviting. Hosts can handle the entire event themselves or enlist the talents and creativity from professionals — whose “party businesses” are exactly what might take the stress away and also entertain the guests with their savoir faire. Whether it’s a late lunch for 12 or a cocktail reception for 50, your orchestration of the party begins with inviting the people who love to participate by being a great guest.

Summer entertaining often means serving food to be eaten with the fingers, sipping jug wine and taking off one’s shoes. Guests do enjoy helping themselves, although it is never careless party planning. With friends and family offering to bring something, it’s okay to decline their offer and let them know that a caterer is handling the details; all they need to do is show up!

Northeast Florida is an ethnic smorgasbord that has become our American table. It’s both intriguing and challenging because, in the course of the meal, you might travel from the Orient to Europe, to South America and the Mediterranean. And if a guest insists upon bringing something without having to be part of the event planning, a pot of fresh herbs might be a perfect finishing touch.

The catering options this season are endless. Here are a few that will take the worry out of making a wise choice.

CHEF CHRISS BROWN

Chef Chriss has been catering for 30 years — and knows how to make an event special. One of the premiere caterers who



Chriss Brown

has been working with the Jacksonville Jaguars, many Jacksonville area corporations and private clientele, she has the knowledge, culinary talent and experience to save clients time, money and headaches.

Well-known for her Route 90 Southern Smoked BBQ catering, she can even provide an entire menu directly from her traveling smoker that makes her clients yearn for more! With 50% of her catering in private homes, she recognizes that “people are going back to the safe choice of entertaining at home!”

ChefChriss.com

THE CHEF’S GARDEN

For more than 23 years, The Chef’s Garden has been creating memorable events throughout the Southeast. From block parties to engagements, Liz and Jen Earnest lead their team creatively from designing the menu to the party’s downbeat! They love transporting their guests to different ports o’ call through the food and experience, using their own specific décor for each theme along with a wide array of menu selections.

Summer luaus are especially popular at the beach and The Chef’s Garden has

created a luau “Par-Tini” — that is, a party package for smaller events that don’t require staffing. Delicious Coconut Crusted Chicken, Chili Garlic Salmon and Kahlua Roasted Pulled Pork ... a yummy do-it-yourself home gathering.

With The Chef’s Garden handling every detail, all you need to do is “pick up the phone and call them.” They are passionate about letting their clients be their inspiration!

cateringjacksonville.com



The Chef’s Garden

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY LEIGH CORT

A TASTE OF LEBANON

From intimate cocktail receptions and dinner parties to elegant full-service catered events, Sherine Akl and Helen Attieh are excited to bring their authentic Lebanese cuisine and traditions to Northeast Florida’s entertaining world.

A Taste of Lebanon is prepared from their hearts, and the kitchen is Sherine’s “Happy Place.” Both partners grew up in a very hospitable culture learning recipe secrets and cooking skills that their guests find

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 ■

SUMMER PARTIES

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

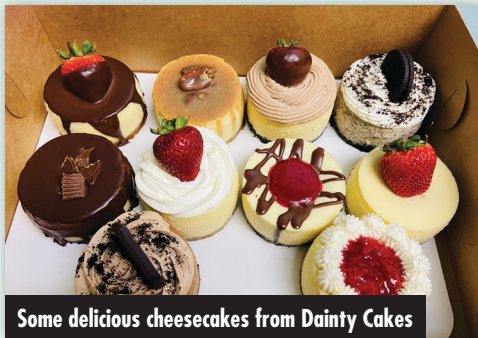
irresistible. Lebanese food brings to mind a kaleidoscope of sensory elements with aromatic herbs and spices, a mezza of hot and cold dishes and their mystical homemade pita bread. From traditional hummus and kebobs to colorful delicious “passables” (hors d’oeuvres), you’d be amazed at how many favors of baklava you can serve!

DAINTY CAKES

Sylvia Fitzgerald’s Dainty Cakes catering is about one virtuoso treat: cheesecakes! Feasting on her rich, beautifully designed cheesecakes means that we can’t resist the seduction of her tiny masterpieces. The three sizes of colorful dainty cakes are bite-sized (really three or four bites), Dainties are three inches round and perfect for sharing. Then, finally, the full-size, nine-inch cakes. Dainty Cakes might be a grand finale to any event, or they could enjoy the limelight of being the only catered item at a dessert party.

A sampling of the 11 flavors include Carmel Pecan, Peanut Butter Cup, Chocolate Raspberry Drizzle, Strawberries & Cream, Irish Cream and Chocolate Ganache.

DaintyCakes.com



Some delicious cheesecakes from Dainty Cakes

WHAT ABOUT BEVERAGES?

What delightfully fun beverage option is one of the cleverest new businesses of the year? Yes, it’s the Tap Truck! Melinda Wood and Greg are driving their restored 1940s truck around to parties throughout Northeast Florida and wowing guests as soon as they glimpse the big white vintage vehicle with beverages tapping out of the side of the truck.

Brought to you by the “Director of Happiness,” it’s a unique way to entertain your guests and keep the party lighthearted for the summer. The truck can be parked outside or driven into your garage, warehouse or party barn. Whether it’s a kids’ event

with lemonade, punch or flavored water or fine beer and wine, one client sums it up: “Tap Truck was an absolute hit at our dinner event, and the best part was the beer and wine that we chose to celebrate was all from local breweries and wineries.”

TapTruckNeFL.com



Tap Truck brings the beverages

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY LEIGH CORT

TAKING CARE OF THE DETAILS

In addition to caterers that might provide their own staffing to handle the infinite details of set-up, service throughout the event, clean-up and sundry event roles that pop up at the last minute, Hospitality Staff has many solutions. Launched in 1997, their servers, bartenders, cooks and all uniformed trained event employees are experienced in the art of hospitality.

Each Hospitality Staff member must work for one year in good standing before offering their services in private homes. Owner Ida Gardner stands behind every employee and guarantees that from arrival and set-up to clean-up and departure, they leave each home or party location exactly the way they found it — and sometimes even better!

hospitalitystaff.com

SETTING THE TEMPO

Even if you’ve been in love with hosting parties since you were a child, even if you loved following caterers around the mansion, even if your grandmother taught you everything you know about table settings, even if people and presents and trays were everywhere in sight at all of your family reunions — music is the heartbeat of almost every event!

Kelly Scott Music has been providing music at events since 1997 (celebrating its 25th anniversary is year) and was featured in the 2022 Jacksonville Jazz Festival as part of the “Hall of Fame” Inductee Allstars group on the Big Stage. Their musical repertoire is extensive, covering favorites from the Great American Songbook to pop jazz that is reminiscent of Michael Buble, Diana Krall, Frank Sinatra, Al Jarreau and

a songbook of great celebrity entertainers. Jazz blues, jazz funk, Bossa Nova, pop jazz and rhythms from New Orleans — they custom-design the band and musical tempo for every party.

The size of the event determines the representation of the band, which ranges from a duo of Lisa Kelly (vocals) and JB Scott (trumpet + quality music tracks) up to their 18-piece Big Band.

An eight-time Downbeat Magazine award winner for voice, composition and arranging, Lisa Kelly is known for her sophisticated stage presence and song styling. JB’s masterful style on trumpet and flugelhorn is sassy, grooving, fiery and beautifully sensitive. He spent years playing in New Orleans clubs of Bourbon Street as front man for the Dukes of Dixieland, in the Latin clubs of Miami, on tours in Japan, featured with symphonies and in the big band sections of the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra!

KellyScottMusic.com



The Lisa Kelly-JB Scott Quintet is one iteration of performers from Kelly Scott Music. The number of performers can range in size from two to 18 to match the size of the festivities.

THE BARN AT PALM VALLEY

If you need to have your entertaining worries roll away, call Deb Chapin and have the entire party “off property” at Ponte Vedra Beach’s cleverly designed The Barn at Palm Valley. With the sweetness of summer that allows you an undemanding, pleasant designed-for-relaxation-and-conversation gathering, take time to pick a few wildflowers, pour yourself a glass of champagne and send out the invitations.

PalmValleyBarn.com

