

Les Dames d'Escoffier International

# Quarterly

SUMMER



2023



Celebrating  
Asian American,  
Pacific Islander,  
and Native American  
Heritage



# Celebrating Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Native American Heritage

It's important to reflect on the historical and cultural contributions of individuals and groups of Asian and Pacific Islander descent to the United States. The effort to officially recognize their contributions began with Congress in the late 1970s. In 1992, under the Bush Administration, Congress passed a public law, which annually designated the month of May as Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month.

Last year, the Biden-Harris Administration designated May as Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month to bring broader visibility to Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities. Pacific Islander refers to those whose origins are the original peoples of Polynesia (Hawaii/Native Hawaiian), Micronesia, and Melanesia (Fiji). The acronym AANHPI is an umbrella term used often throughout this story.

During November 1-30, National Native American Heritage Month (NNAHM) honors American Indians and Alaska Natives for their rich, varied cultures, history, traditions, and societal contributions. They are recognized as America's original inhabitants who made vital contributions to the United States and the world, notably their prehistoric harvesting of potatoes and corn.

Equally important are several Canadian national heritage celebrations in June. National Indigenous History Month recognizes the history of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. June 21 is National Indigenous Peoples Day. In this story, read about 19 Dames—cultural icons—of Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American descent who are rocking the world with their contributions to hospitality, food, and wine. In alignment with their own values, they offer us the most authentic version of themselves.—**Susan Slack** (Charleston)



## Natalie Keng

(Atlanta) | Global Hearth

### *From Mudpies to Egg Rolls*

Making mudpie cupcakes topped with dandelions from her yard was foretelling Atlanta Dame **Natalie Keng's** future in culinary entrepreneurship.

Natalie is a trail blazer whose quest for knowledge is rooted in her Asian American heritage and being a native Georgian. Her constant search for increased learning has led her to new discoveries starting with the importance of community as the basis for achieving diversity. They have provided a compass for exploring life outside of the South. Creating community through food and culture has and continues to be the compass that drives her decisions, from working for a Fortune 100 company to starting her own small business. As the daughter of Asian parents who emigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan on academic scholarships, Natalie was born and raised in Smyrna, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta, where she still resides.

Having grown up in the 70s, a time when Asians were confronted with discrimination, Natalie realized she didn't look like the typical southerner. When it was time to look at colleges, Natalie was ready for a new lifestyle...that of living in the North. Natalie chose Vassar College, one of The Seven Sisters. With scholarships and a work-study program, Natalie graduated from Vassar and went on to obtain a Master of Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. After working in the business world as a marketing executive for a Fortune 100 company and heading up leadership development and diversity teams for national nonprofit organizations, Natalie was restless for a career that would satisfy her desire for bringing cultures and diversity together. So, she decided to pivot and return to Atlanta. In 2009, Natalie opened her first business, Chinese Southern Belle, LLC. Along with her mother, Margaret Keng, the duo began cooking classes, custom interactive events, and tours to shatter stereotypes and promote community, diversity and inclusion. As her events grew in popularity, Natalie discovered parallels between Chinese and Southern foods. She built her small business around a community of sharing and creating new ways to combine Southern and Asian culture.

Just as she was enjoying business success, COVID-19 hit. Natalie's business came to a halt, but she didn't. She quotes a Chinese proverb: "Out of crisis comes opportunity," says Natalie. And that opportunity has been brought to life under the name "Global Hearth." With the tagline, "Cooking Up a Better World," Natalie is Founder and CEO (Chief Eating Officer). Global Hearth's platform centers around inspiring, interactive, and impactful presentations to businesses. Some of her clients include Chick fil A, Deloitte, Home Depot, and Invesco. Her topics include leadership development, employment engagement, and retention of talent, "all vital to the bottom line," says Natalie.

While Natalie was continuing to increase her presentations and work with community organizations, she decided to extend her growing enterprise by developing Asian-American sauces and marinades. With no experience in food science, she knew the flavors she was seeking so started to experiment. When asked about these ingredients, Natalie's response, "I just opened the refrigerator door and started mixing sauces, using a little bit of this and a little bit of that." The results are in the three bottled sauces, *Wild Wild West™*; *You Saucy Thing™* which was inspired by her grandmother; and *My Sweet Hottie™*. Natalie has now earned the title, "Sauce Maven™." Among other national awards, these sauces have won two Flavor of Georgia awards and have been featured at national restaurant shows.

Most recently, Natalie launched her new cookbook-memoir, *Egg Rolls & Sweet Tea*. Recipes include a fusion of Asian American dishes created by her parents and grandparents. New flavors from combining Southern and Asian favorites result in recipes such as *Preppy Pink & Green Handmade Dumpling Wrappers*. Colorful photos of recipes interspersed with her stories of growing up in an era of discrimination and rejection are historical accounts of Natalie's experiences that led to her on-going success today. —**Suzanne Brown** (Atlanta)