

unity



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Vegetarian-restaurant  
owner elevates  
culinary scene

**INSIDE:**

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# Driven to ride, destined to make an impact



Mary Jo Beckman says her work with the Caisson Platoon Equine Assisted Program "was an absolute joy."

By the time Mary Jo Beckman was born in Austin, Texas, everyone in her family was riding horses. Not surprisingly, the youngest member of this military clan took up the sport. Throughout her childhood, Beckman and her three brothers had their share of riding lessons and participated in horse shows.

Beckman's childhood pursuits put her on a path she's well-equipped to traverse. A retired Navy commander, Beckman is a respected therapeutic riding instructor who attained master-level status in that field ten years ago. Most therapeutic riding instructors are women, says Beckman, and she believes most work part time.

Beckman has been a driving instructor with the Loudoun Therapeutic Riding Program in Leesburg, Virginia, since 1997. The organization "is dedicated to empowering, enhancing and enriching the lives of individuals with physical, cognitive or psychological challenges through the benefits of horseback riding, carriage driving and other equine-assisted activities and therapies."

A resident of Falls Church, Virginia, Beckman is also a riding instructor for the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda/Rock Creek Park Horse Center program.



Mary Jo Beckman, right, works with Devora Exline at the Morven Park Equestrian Center. Photo courtesy of the Loudoun Therapeutic Riding program

In 2006, Beckman and Larry Pence launched the Caisson Platoon Equine Assisted Program "with the intent of using some of the Army's horses that provide military honors in Arlington Cemetery," Beckman recently told *Unity* magazine. "For six years, I was the instructor and lessons were provided at Fort Myer, Virginia, for wounded military (mostly with amputations) undergoing rehabilitation at Walter Reed." She and Pence were volunteers.

Army, Marine and Air Force veterans, and several civilians rehabbed at Walter Reed. The horses, Beckman notes, were "completely Army."

Beckman doesn't know exactly how many veterans participated in the program. She does know, however, that the cognitive, emotional and physical benefits they gained were numerous.

"In 2012, the Army moved the program to their facility at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and for three years, Larry Pence coordinated lessons for military that had suffered traumatic brain injuries. We saw many successes in both programs."

By fall 2016, Beckman and Pence were no longer involved with the caisson program, which had been featured in countless news articles and in a Smithsonian Channel special about Arlington National Cemetery.

It was an amazing six years and it was an absolute joy, an absolute rush," says Beckman. "That's something you can't get paid for."

To this day, she stays in contact with some of the program's former patients. "It's really kind of special to hear from these folks," she says with great fondness.

# Professor's mission: Keep honeybees healthy and strong



Marla Spivak is a respected authority on honeybees.

Honeybees are little insects with a big purpose. They are essential to the agricultural industry, as bees pollinate a third of our food supply. With rising concerns about the decimation of bee populations in recent years due to disease and exposure to pesticides, scientists are working hard to protect honeybee populations and, by extension, our food supply.

Spivak, who holds a McKnight professorship in entomology at the University of Minnesota and directs the Bee Lab there, knows as much about these matters as anyone, has a particular affinity for honeybees.

"I most definitely learn new things about bees on a regular basis," she says. "Bees seem like an infinite well of information: The more I learn, the less I know. This is humbling and inspiring, and keeps me going."



Her interest was piqued in college, when she pulled an all-nighter to finish a book on bees. She began working for commercial beekeepers as an undergrad and later spent two years in Costa Rica conducting research on Africanized and European honeybees.

Her work at the University of Minnesota earned her a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship in 2010, allowing her to venture into more innovative experiments than she otherwise could have, all with the purpose of helping bees and beekeepers.

"As a beekeeper, you need to know what flowers are in bloom within a 2-mile radius of your bee colony to determine if your bees have enough to eat and whether they will make honey," she explains. "You become aware of how prevalent pesticide use is and which ones are toxic to bees, which is very eye-opening for many people."

Her research is aimed at fostering healthy, strong colonies of bees for honey production and pollination; as a bonus she spends time outside looking at bee colonies, not only for her research but also for pleasure.



"Bees help people connect with nature," she says. "Opening a bee hive can be meditative as you need to move slowly and carefully to avoid being stung, and you need to pay attention – you can't be in a hurry. A few stings help a beekeeper stay humble; the honey reward makes a beekeeper proud."

"I have absolutely no idea what the future holds for me or the bees, but I'm an optimist," she concludes. "I think all the current awareness about the plight of bees will lead to changes that benefit bees."

# Personal passion projects

These artists employ different mediums and techniques to craft singular works reflecting the passions that drive each of them.



"Awakening" by Laurie Flaherty

## LAURIE FLAHERTY

From a young age, Laurie Flaherty was interested in drawing and painting. Flaherty's high school teacher encouraged her to paint murals and enter art competitions. Years later, Flaherty earned her Bachelor of Fine Art in painting at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio and her Master of Fine Art in painting from the University of Pennsylvania.

"I have always been inspired by the natural world," says Flaherty. "This is where I find a sense of exhilaration and peace." After beginning with a collage of an image, Flaherty gradually adds shapes, patterns and colors to her work. It is her intention to connect foliage patterns with birds and "Awakening" is no exception. The gaze between two red-bellied woodpeckers and the opening blossom express an awakening in the midst of surrounding activity.



"Flutter" by Laurie Flaherty

"Flutter" focuses on upward and outward movements showing a sense of freedom that birds and butterflies embody. Warmth exudes from the oranges and browns as the plant opens toward the sun.

Flaherty's "Masquerade," a Victoria Crowned pigeon with speckled legs, is immersed in

an environment of similar spotted plants. "I wanted to celebrate the glorious foreign quality of this beautiful blue bird with her phenomenal headdress," Flaherty says. All three works featured here are painted with gouache on paper.



"Masquerade" by Laurie Flaherty

Flaherty has had many solo and group exhibitions throughout New England and Ohio, and her work can be found in collections in Connecticut, New Jersey and Massachusetts.

## OLGA KRASOVSKA



"Cup of Coffee" by Olga Krasovska

A native of the Ukraine, Olga Krasovska spent her childhood in Egypt, where she was introduced to her first art lessons. After graduation, Krasovska was invited to work as an art teacher at the Pedagogical University located in Krivoy Rog, Ukraine. She moved to the United States in 2004.

Krasovska uses a technique of blending watercolor, ink and gouache on cotton fabric. She says painting on cotton fabric can be challenging because, unlike canvas that is primed, there is no way to stop pigment, ink and watercolor from moving where they want to go. "While trying to achieve realistic representation," Krasovska says, "the veracity of perspective and contour can easily be destroyed." Yet, as she controls the process, the beauty of the images illuminate against the softness of the cotton fibers.

Krasovska's use of color conveys a retro-style sense of fashion in three pieces from her Time Elegance collection. "When I look at old family photos," says Krasovska, "I think of how beautiful and soulful women look no matter the style or fashion of the day."

The woman in "Cup of Coffee" appears to be pondering thoughts of fondness.



"Shawl" and "Parienne 2" by Olga Krasovska

"Shawl" reveals the opulent grace and softness of a woman whose shawl drapes seductively just below her shoulder blade.



A captivating stare and subtle smile are seen in "Parienne 2." The subject's soft, sheer, elegant dress matches her demeanor.

"My whole life has been consumed with passion for fine art," Krasovska says. "I have been fortunate to study, practice or teach art styles and techniques. It's very inspiring that women from different cultures find an instant connection between each other and (with) my work."

## MARCELA STAUDENMAIER

Born in Argentina, Marcela Staudenmaier has enjoyed drawing since preschool. She earned her degree in architecture from the National University of Tucuman and eventually pursued a career with an architectural firm in the United States. Driven by her lifelong passion for drawing and writing, she enrolled in the Children's Book Illustration Certificate Program at the Rhode Island School of Design

"The experience of building architectural models has been a big influence on my work to achieve the dimensionality of my illustrations," says Staudenmaier. Starting with a penciled sketch, the images are cut from sheets of bright-colored paper. The flat shapes



"Good Morning" by Marcela Staudenmaier

are then curled, scored, folded, overlapped and glued down to create the illusion of depth.

Staudenmaier captures the sense of a gentle breeze flowing through sheer white curtains in her piece "Good Morning," which reminds her of her cat and the kittens who lounged on her childhood bed every morning.

"Fly Away" illustrates a couple from a poem Staudenmaier wrote about friendship. The red bottom of the balloon and white seagulls look as if they can be plucked easily off the background of bright blue sky.

"Tom and Becky" – inspired by a passage from "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" – displays an endearing and innocent exchange between the two. The girl's bright yellow hair shows the intricacies of Staudenmaier's process.

Staudenmaier is the recipient of numerous illustration awards and her work has appeared in group exhibits throughout New England. Her architectural contributions are also part of buildings throughout the United States. She is a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.



"Fly Away" and "Tom and Becky" by Marcela Staudenmaier



# Photographer captures the beauty of food – and culture



Photos by Penny De Los Santos

Penny De Los Santos describes herself as both food photographer and food ethnographer. Although she has visited more than 30 countries to capture images of the nearly infinite colors and textures of food, what De Los Santos conveys most eloquently through her photography is food's ability to connect us all.

"What I've realized in photographing this subject is that food connects us like nothing else I've ever seen. It has the ability to peel away all of our differences and help us find a common language," De Los Santos said in a TedX talk she delivered in Austin, Texas. "Food is the most honest and simple expression of who we are."

De Los Santos, in an interview with *Unity*, says she has always had an interest in photography. "I went to Texas A&M for journalism. I got an undergraduate degree in visual communications and then went on to get a graduate degree from Ohio University. But my big break came when I landed an internship at National Geographic," she explains. "I started out focused mostly on the work of documenting cultures around the world and telling stories from a geographical perspective."

De Los Santos spent 10 years with National Geographic. She was sent to locations that wouldn't generally be considered the most conducive to stunning photography. "That work," she explains, "taught me to be a problem solver. I learned to follow my intuition and to pull a story from nothing. I learned to be persistent and wait for just the right moment. That was when I learned a ton about color, composition and light."

In a twist of fate, an editor sent De Los Santos to Peru and Chile to shoot images for a food magazine. "My editor told me to do what I was

already doing, and to document culture. He said, 'Don't worry about the food.'"

The writer with whom De Los Santos was working had a doctorate in food history. "It was this incredible thing. I walked through this marketplace in Chile with her, and she was telling me how the ingredients for sale there – this fruit, or that vegetable – got to the region and how it was used. I was blown away by the ways food migrated. I was fascinated by the foodways and how they influence regions, and how food tells the story of history."

De Los Santos says she was hooked. "I realized in the course of that one assignment that you can really come to understand a culture through its food. After that, I decided I would take every food photography assignment I could, and that I would take extra time with every subject."

The culinary storyteller was born to Mexican-American parents who were in the military. "Growing up in a military family meant living on military bases and shopping in military commissaries. The military isn't the most culturally rich, but that made me search for culture in my own life. Now, when I go around the world and look at the way people gather and celebrate, I'm more appreciative of it because of the way I grew up."

De Los Santos has sat at some incredible tables. "I recently went to Italy on assignment. At the end of this olive harvest we all made this incredible table in the olive groves. We sat down, and there were magnums of wine. Truly, I have sat at so many amazing tables," De Los Santos says. "When I think back about my career I can see it's really more about the people than the food. Almost every time it's about the people and the experience I have shared with them."



# Restaurateur elevates culinary scene



Restaurant owner/chef Amanda Cohen is a champion of “the vegetable-forward movement.” Photo by Georgi Richardson at Maggie Marguerite

New York City’s Lower East Side is home to Dirt Candy, the city’s premiere vegetable-focused restaurant. At the helm is chef/owner Amanda Cohen, a prominent advocate of what’s known as “the vegetable-forward movement.”

While at its previous location, the restaurant received two stars from *The New York Times* – making it the first vegetarian restaurant in 17 years to receive that distinction – and was recognized by the *Michelin Guide* five consecutive years. Dirt Candy’s current location opened in January 2015, and garnered more attention when it became the first NYC restaurant to eliminate tipping and share profits with its employees.

Cohen was the first vegetarian chef to compete on TV’s “*Iron Chef America*” and her comic-book cookbook, “*Dirt Candy: A Cookbook*,” is the first graphic novel cookbook to be published in North America. The Canadian restaurateur recently spoke to *Unity* about vegetables – naturally – and more.

**Q. How would you describe your restaurant in five words?**

**A.** We make vegetables fun.

**Q. What is your least-favorite vegetable to eat, and why?**

**A.** Every vegetable is awesome, it’s just harder to find the awesomeness hiding inside, say, a rutabaga than it is to uncover it in a carrot. But it’s there.

**Q. Which dish, that’s currently on your menu, did you once find intimidating and/or nearly impossible to cook?**

**A.** The Grilled Broccoli Dogs. They were a radically different dish that I experimented with for months

before throwing it out in frustration and, in a fit of anger, making a joke about broccoli hot dogs and then realizing that, yes, of course. Broccoli hot dogs.

**Q. For parents struggling to get their kids to eat vegetables, what dish would you recommend and how is it prepared?**

**A.** It’s not just kids. Everyone’s struggling to eat vegetables because they feel like they should be eating them, but you can’t cook vegetables like meat and expect them to turn out delicious.

**A few small tips:**

- Fat carries flavor. Vegetables have no natural fat, so make sure that you use oil or butter when you cook vegetables. And if you use oil, cook some onions and garlic in it first to flavor it.
- Salt your salads. No one salts salads and it makes a huge difference.
- Shock and blanch. Drop your vegetables in boiling water for 20 to 30 seconds, then drop them in ice water. Sometimes that’s all the cooking they need and this will preserve their color and keep them looking pretty on the plate.
- Grill your greens. Grilling hearty greens like kale and collards gives them a meaty, rich flavor.

**Q. Your IMDb profile says you once worked for (musician) Moby. Were you his personal chef? How long did you work for him?**

**A.** I was the first chef at TeaNY, Moby’s vegan tea shop on the Lower East Side (now closed). I was there for about three years, doing all the cooking and baking in my tiny apartment because they didn’t have much of a kitchen (the only equipment in the shop were some portable hot plates and toaster ovens). I used to be up at 4 a.m. to start baking and then I’d have to haul everything from my apartment in Spanish Harlem down to TeaNY.

**Q. When did you last spend an entire day not centered on food, and what did you do?**

**A.** The first day of work I missed in seven years that didn’t involve cooking at another restaurant was when I went to my nephew’s bar mitzvah.

**Q. Before opening your own establishment, at which restaurant did you learn the most about the restaurant business?**

**A.** Everything I thought I knew about the restaurant business went out the window when I opened the original Dirt Candy. There is no crash course in the restaurant business more brutal and eye-opening than owning your own place. Until then I thought I knew about this business, but I didn’t know a thing.

# 'Pioneer' star's fame is unabated



Ree Drummond of "The Pioneer Woman" gains more popularity each decade. Photo by Bill Nyard

Nobody does a better job introducing Ree Drummond than, well, Ree Drummond. On her blog, "The Pioneer Woman," she describes herself as "a desperate housewife" who lives in the country, where she channels Lucille Ball, Vivien Leigh and Ethel Merman.

And this is not just any blog; It's one that garners 23 million visitors per month. The wife of a cattle rancher, whom she affectionately calls "Marlboro Man," Drummond welcomes readers to her "frontier," also known as the family's ranch in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, and chronicles their daily life, from homeschooling to hound dogs to her thoughts on Hollywood. These tidbits have earned her multiple Weblog awards, including top prize – Weblog of the Year – for several years running.

The impetus for her blog was a few hours she spent alone in 2006. Marlboro Man had taken their four children to work cattle with him, affording Drummond uninterrupted time at the computer to begin posting her thoughts. She's said that she never imagined it would take off as it has. But it's the serendipitous nature of the blog and Drummond's life that account for her popularity. She never planned to marry a cattle rancher – her plans included law school in Chicago, a path for which she'd been bred – but then met her husband. She never planned to start a blog, but her posts allow other women to imagine that they, too, might meet the man of their dreams and take the road less traveled.

In "Black Heels to Tractor Wheels," a New York Times bestseller published in 2011, Drummond tells the story of changing her life's path. It's not Drummond's first foray into writing beyond the blog. She has posted a plethora of recipes on her site over the years, and in 2009, she published her first cookbook "The Pioneer Woman Cooks," another best-seller. Her most recent cookbook, "The Pioneer Woman Cooks: Dinnertime," was published in 2015.

When The Food Network caught wind of Drummond's cookbook and her brand of ranch cooking, it invited her to host a daytime series on the network. Her show, "Pioneer Woman," debuted in August 2011 and is as popular as ever.

## Butternut Squash And Kale

- 1/2 whole butternut squash, peeled, seeded and cubed
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- Black pepper, to taste
- 1/4 teaspoon chili powder, or more to taste
- 1 bunch kale, leaves torn, stalks discarded

Heat 1 tablespoon butter and olive oil in a large skillet over high heat. Add the squash and sprinkle with salt, pepper and chili powder. Cook for several minutes, turning gently with a spatula, until the squash is golden brown and tender (but not falling apart.) Remove to a plate and set aside.

In the same skillet, melt 1 tablespoon of butter over medium-high heat and add in the kale. Toss it with tongs and cook it for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the cooked squash and gently toss together.

Serve as a side dish with chicken or beef, as a main veggie dish, or as a filling for quesadillas or sandwiches.

**Yield:** 8 servings