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January 5 - January 11, 2013 47th Year Volume 34 www.ladatanews.com

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Leah Chase

A Celebration of the Life of the Queen of Creole Cuisine



Leah Chase, the Queen of Creole Cuisine inside the dining room at Dooky Chase.

By Edwin Buggage

A Journey Through Life From the Strawberry Patch to the Smithsonian

Leah Chase is a name that has become synonymous with New Orleans, its heritage and culture. As the face of the family owned Dooky Chase Restaurant, named for her father-in-law, she is world renown for her Creole style cooking and is known by many as the Queen of Creole Cuisine. On

January 6th she will turn ninety years young. She is a woman that exudes elegance, optimism, and home spun wisdom that is an endless well to which one can be fed words to live by.

Speaking of her life's journey which she affectionately refers to, "From the Strawberry Patch to the Smithsonian," she says, "My life hasn't been a crystal staircase, but I've survived it. I was born in Madisonville, Louisiana where we picked strawberries, then I came here to New Orleans to go to high school and graduated when I was sixteen and went back home and there was not much work but housework, and cooking. So I came back here

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DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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Please call 504-309-9913 for subscription information or to obtain a back issue of the paper ONLY.
Dated material two weeks in advance. Not responsible for publishing or return of unsolicited manuscripts or photos.

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Edgar "Dooky" Chase II



The Chase's children gather with their mother and father.

to work at 18 and was a waitress in the French Quarter. And that really started me to get to like the restaurant business and it's been good to me. It's been hard work, but it's paid off."

A selfless giver, she and her husband Edgar Chase II, passed this trait onto their four children of which three are still living. Stella Reese, her second oldest daughter speaks about her mother and the formation of the Edgar "Dooky" Jr. and Leah Chase Family Foundation. "We feel this foundation is important, we want the legacy to live on and because we've always been involved in the community we want to continue in that tradition and the part my mother and father played in music and the arts, and also in the area of social justice and we thought this was the best way to do that."

While most people know her for her savory mouth-watering dishes and her different color chef jackets, Stella Reese talks about her parents and how involved her mother was when she was growing up, "My mother and father instilled faith in us and we always put God first and we were told that that is what would see us through during life's ups and downs. We saw our parents giving to the community and even before she got involved in the restaurant, she was involved in our school, she was a Girl Scout leader, President of the PTA, and she organized fundraisers for the school and the church.

During the weekend preced-

ing her birthday there will be a host of events honoring this phenomenal woman. On Friday January 4th there will be three lunch seatings featuring a special menu of Mrs. Chase's favorites and members of the community will share stories about their relationship with this storied couple and their restaurant. And on January 5th "The Dinner of a Lifetime" will be held at the Hyatt Regency with a cocktail reception followed by a four course meal prepared by her dearest chef friends that are inspired by her dishes.

The Meaning of Life

While many people that are at the stage of life of Mrs. Chase are rocking back in their easy chair, she is still in her kitchen doing what she loves to do, "I think I've been very fortunate in my life, I am coming up on 90 years old and this is what I've done my entire life. I like to work, some say I should quit, but why would I do that, I'm happy when I'm working, I am happy when I am doing things," she remarks, continuing she says it's helped her through many events in her life, "I'll never forget when I lost my mother, I was in the restaurant, when I lost my father I was in the restaurant. I feel in my kitchen I can survive, it is like medicine to me. And when I think back to when I lost my daughter she died at 1:00 AM and I opened the restaurant at 11:00 AM, and that day I can truly say that day there were a lot of tears in the gumbo for sure."

Throughout her life, it has been like a sanctuary for her bringing her solace and peace, "My kitchen was like a remedy for me. Just to be there and be in my work and just try to get over things, it's been my life and there is nothing I want to complain about. Recently, I buried my brother on Christmas Day, but as I live my life I always just say, Thank you Jesus, for life has been good to me."

Mrs. Chase is a woman who has lived her life serving others, "My life is all about giving, and this party my children and grandchildren are giving for me, I am so grateful, because I never thought I would live to see a party like this given for me. But I still can't figure it out because I am still not comfortable on the receiving end; I am comfortable on the giving end. If I can do things for people that's where I am happy and that's the way we were brought up work, pray and do for others and that's how I've always lived my life."

Inspiration for the Next Generation

In what is coming up on her nine decades of life she has seen the City change, and with the formation of their foundation they are hoping to inspire young people to reach their full potential. Speaking of the changes that's taken place she says, "The City's changed a lot, I grew up during the depression and segregated times, when people didn't have opportunities and nothing was open for

you, and I see so many things have changed and I say today as I thought back then I don't care what you do or what you call me but just don't close the door on me. So many doors were closed back then and I guess back then they didn't know any better and they didn't realize how much they were losing when they shut a lot of people out because all these people they shut out had something to offer and the more people you have doing things the better your City is and your country will be. And I tell people today that doors are open, and what they should do when they get there is what I believe is work to the best of our ability and say don't shut me out and don't get in my way."

Her home spun wisdom is inspirational and her zest for life is amazing to experience, she is a woman who is an eternal optimist. Speaking of the young people of today she says, "When I see young people, I just tell them keep doing what you do, keep helping other people and everything in the world can work out for you and you may never become a millionaire, but so what you've enjoyed life and enjoyed living and that's the most important thing is to enjoy life."

Rebuilding Dooky Chase and Reflections on New Orleans

As many of us suffered a great loss during Hurricane Katrina

and now over seven years later are still putting the pieces of our collective lives back together. Mrs. Chase and her family's restaurant have come to symbolize the hope and the future of the City and its rebuilding. After water flooded both her home and business she was determined to return to the City she loves. Speaking of those times she says, "I had nowhere to go, you go to other places, and for example they had this place in Birmingham, Alabama and we could have bought it with everything in it. Well I said no I am too old I am going back home to New Orleans. There is no other place like it, the people are a caring people, they help one another and they may have their differences, but there are no other people like us. You are not going to go to a place where people always say good morning to you the way we do, and sometimes all you need is a good morning to make you feel good."

And while she feels fortunate that so many came to her aid to help her rebuild her business, she is saddened by what happened in other parts of the City that are still in a state of distress, particularly the Lower Ninth Ward, "I consider myself blessed because you had people in the Lower Ninth Ward and that is the saddest thing for me, I still cannot deal with it. They were retired older people who'd paid for their homes and living on their pension. And here

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A Man Dedicated to Service

Dr. Elliot Willard - 1931 - 2012

by Edwin Buggage
Photos by Terry B. Jones
and Ray Bonnee

A great New Orleanian, Dr. Elliot Willard passed away on December 24th 2012. He was a man who dedicated his life to service and giving.

He was a man who received many awards throughout his long and amazing life. Data News Weekly honored him as one of its monthly Trailblazers in 2010-2011. He was someone who loved the paper and it's mission as "The People's Paper" according to his daughter Cynthia Willard-Lewis, whose held several

statewide elected offices, she says, "My dad loved Data News and he was good friends with the paper's founder Joseph "Scoop" Jones." And in this time of loss for the Willard family, we at Data News Weekly send out our condolences and want them to know that our prayers are with them. In this issue of Data News Weekly we spoke

to two of his children Judge Ben Willard and Cynthia Willard-Lewis about their father's life and legacy.

Judge Ben Willard

The family is extremely grateful for all of the heartfelt thanks that everyone shared their thoughts about a man who inspired so many people. And the

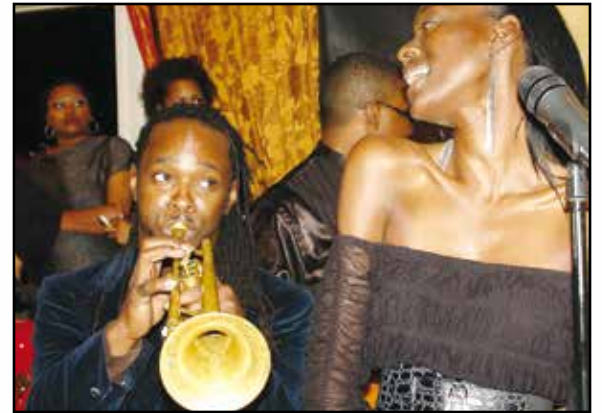


Shoot Ya Best Shot!

Second Annual Holiday Extravaganza

Photos by Glenn Summers

Nathanael Scales owner of Garden Doctors and Louisiana Hospice of Greater New Orleans held his Second Annual Holiday Extravaganza at the Ritz-Carlton Juneau Penthouse and Data News Weekly was there.'



Strengthening Your Resolve



Dr. Eric Griggs, MD
Data News Columnist

res•o•lu•tion (rz-lshn) n.

1. The state or quality of being resolute; firm determination.
2. A resolving to do something.
3. A course of action determined or decided on. (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/resolution>)

"Each January, roughly one in three Americans resolve to better themselves in some way. A much smaller percentage of people actually make good on those resolutions. While about 75% of people stick to their goals

for at least a week, less than half (46%) are still on target six months later, a 2002 study found." (<http://bit.ly/hCohLI>)

Every year the same story, the same routine. We resolve to be better people, give up old habits, go to church, lose weight and the list goes on. The number of gym and church memberships spike for the month of January and attendance begins to taper after the first week. The year always seems to start with a bang and end with an excuse. The solution and secret to success is actually quite simple and easy to achieve. When making resolutions this year, KEEP IT SIMPLE.

1- Resolve to be more resolute.

The simplest resolution to keep is to be more determined in your actions, whatever they may be. Set goals for yourself that are easily attainable and can be built upon each week. Take the "one

day at a time" approach, building a record of success along the way. Start small, end BIG, but focus on remaining focused.

2- Choose to Lose One Bite At a Time.

One of the biggest mistakes that people make when attempting to lose weight is setting lofty goals and resorting to drastic measures. My grandmother always said, "Fast doesn't last. Slow down and do it right." When it comes to weight loss, these words ring true. Smaller portions of food and increased water consumption make the simplest recipe for success. Eat slowly, chewing each bite. Drink a bottle of water with every meal. Stop eating when feeling full-simple as that. Keep a food journal. This really helps. Honesty is key. Review it every day. Remember, no one is perfect.

The average amount of safe weight loss is between 1-3 pounds per week. The math for a success-

ful year is that if we attempt to lose a mere one pound per week, that's a 52 pound weight loss in 12 months. That's success in most circles.

3- Get Checked. Get Fit. Get Moving.

Before beginning to attempt any lifestyle change, health or otherwise, go to the doctor. Life moves quickly, and change is difficult. Without change there can be no growth, but the cost of change is stress. Make it a point to see your primary care physician within the first 2 months of the year and alert them of your new goals. You might be surprised by how helpful a physician can be to your plan.

The next step is to mentally prepare yourself for the upcoming change by reminding yourself that each day is a new beginning and that change will be easier each day. Acknowledge your daily accomplishments and know that

failure is not an option. Don't look back. Allow for minor setbacks, but learn from them and keep it moving. A strong mind is built by tests of endurance.

Finally, Get up, Get out and MOVE! It doesn't require a gym membership to lose weight and stay fit. Find something you enjoy and DO IT- daily. The key to weight loss is a simple equation of in's and out's. The goal is to take in less than you burn up by MOVING. All activities, including dancing, walking, gardening, riding a bicycle, laughing, smiling, swimming and jogging burn calories and NONE of them cost large sums of money. Move it and Lose it!

This year is the Year of Success - Your Year. Make it Happen.

Prescription for the Week: There is no better time than the beginning of the New Year. Resolve to Succeed. Get Checked. Get Fit. Get Moving!

Pipeline to the People

by Corey Anderson

Data News Weekly wants to know what are your New Year's Resolutions? Join us on Facebook and let us know and make sure to include your photo.



D'Tara Frank

"My new year's resolution is actually to be more prosperous this year than last year, working towards goals and just living life."



Joell Schroeder

"To be more aware of the people that I work with here at Xavier...to be more accessible to them, the students and the staff. If they have a problem, to be here, to be available to them, to give them what they're looking for. To be able to counsel them in some sort of way or encourage them or whatever it is that they need."



Jared Romance

"My new year's resolution for 2013 is going to be just keep doing what I'm doing; just do it better and achieve my goals."

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greatest thing any of his students can do today is pick up the cause of education because education is the only guarantee that they will have a better tomorrow.

We were happy that my dad was a public person; he paved the way for my success as well as the success of my brothers and sisters. He set a great example in terms of manhood and fatherhood. He taught us that men were supposed to be responsible and my father personified that and he was not just an example for me but for other young men as well.

My mother and father were together for 60 years and my father counseled many on marriage and he found great joy in helping young people stay together. He also taught us the importance of volunteering and serving others without compensation. His religious and spiritual faith was very important to him and guided him through life. He always put God first, he earned the nickname "altar boy" at an early age because he was always volunteering to say

mass and to be an altar server and on any given day of the week. He went to mass because he said he had a lot to be thankful for and a lot to pray for with 12 kids and 30 plus grandchildren, something he was always thankful for so I would be remiss if I didn't mention anything about his spiritual life one which brought him to church on a daily basis.

Cynthia Willard-Lewis

My father was a very loving and affirming dad, who continually encouraged his children to fulfill their dreams. But his children were not limited to his biological children, it included every student of his, and every person who sought advice from him or counsel from him and it ranged from men and women of power and prominence to boys and girls on the street corners that he desired to save from the culture of violence.

His entire life was focused outward never inward, he was selfless, generous and he always

believed in faith, hope and love. He was a man of peace and was distressed by many of the young people in our City whose lives were cut short by violence and he would minister and work in programs that would rescue our children. His professional training was in education, but his personal training was in making young men and women into life giving contributing individuals. There are so many stories about the greatness and unselfishness of our dad. And my life is filled with his stories, he was a master story teller and teacher and he followed the master in God and Christ.

He used the Christian principles of forgiveness, healing the broken hearted, bridging the gaps with dignity and respect to create positive change and that's why thousands of people came out because he is a man who loved his entire life. And for him love was not a Hallmark or Valentine's Day card it was an everyday experience of giving and serving even at his own risk. He did it

for the children in the St. Bernard Housing Project, he did it for his in the Calliope Housing Project for his students at Booker T. Washington helping them stay out of trouble and to visit the homes of single mothers. He did it when he stood with the ministers when violent street gangs were warring. He did it in the boardroom and the classroom and he was consistent with his approach to life and his consistent positive attitude of being an effective agent of change.

Our family is very grateful and thankful for the wonderful outpouring of support, love and affection for my father. It was very encouraging to us and helped us through this sorrowing process, seeing how many people loved our dad knowing that the good work he did was recognized by others. And we are very grateful to everyone who came out to the different programs and honored him with their presence.

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comes the storm blowing everything away, and they are left with no house, no nothing and how are you going to get that back at eighty something years old? You can't and what's happened is that some of them had to go live with relatives, so we lost a whole community and while I am glad to see some people helping, it still is not enough help being put into its rebuilding. Because there were a lot of good people who were homeowners who lived there, now all that's washed away and nothing but the foundation of their houses are left, that makes me sad. So I consider myself blessed to be able to get some help to re-open this restaurant. And I still hope that more emphasis is placed on rebuilding that community."

Joie De Vivre (Joy of Living)

Mrs. Chase is a woman who loves life and is down to earth, lovable and sort of like everybody's grandmother. She is the ultimate people person and has

a great sense of humor. Laughingly, she recounts another time she was on the cover of Data News Weekly, "The Data News have been good to me, and I like to say I was the first Data Doll, I remember when Scoop Jones died and his son Terry took over and he put me on the front page of Data, there was my picture and I was so grateful for that and after that they had the Data Dolls and there were pretty girls in the paper, and I always say I don't care how pretty those other girls were I was the first."

She is a woman who believes that all people have something to give and that anyone can contribute. Speaking of how through her business she's met and learned from so many different types of people over the years she says, "It has been fun looking at your life and those who come your way, the likes of Scoop Jones coming my way and leaving me with a little something to hang onto and so many others that's made my

life richer and fuller." Continuing she says, "The more people that come your way they leave you something. I have worked in this business for 67 years across from the Lafitte Housing Project and I have met all kinds of people and they were good people who would come and talk to me and I am all the better because of it."

Recipe for a Good Life

Leah Chase is known for feeding many important people including several heads of state, she says everyone who's come through her doors is equally important. And it is the local people who sustains her business and her life, "People always tell me how many presidents and other people I've fed, it's nice but presidents come and go and although it's a good feeling, I think about that man who comes every day and that's the one I will always appreciate, the everyday person who came into the restaurant that left me with something to hold onto."

Known as the "Queen of Creole Cuisine" she has fed many with her food, but she has fed many more with her great spirit, positive outlook and a joy of living or as the French would say, Joie De Vivre. And as a woman who has many great recipes, one of the most important ones is her recipe for a good and prosperous life, "This is a recipe my daddy gave me; my mother had 14 children and raised 11 and all of us were still alive until this year when I lost a sister and a brother and my sister was 88 years old and my brother was 73, and the only things we lived by was these three things: pray, work and do for others and if you do these things you can make it through life and you know what we always made it." At 90 years of age Leah Chase continues to serve heaping helpings of her food for the soul inspiring the City and the world with the best of New Orleans.

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