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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...
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 preceding 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 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
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 its 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
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

“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/hCohLJ)

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 resolve.

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 successful 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.”

Joeell 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.”
Newsmaker/Continued from page 4.

Her grandmother. She is the lovable and sort of like everyone loves life and is down to earth, ultimate people person and has Joie De Vivre (Joy of Living) that more emphasis is placed on this restaurant. And I still hope who lived there, now all that’s being put into its rebuilding. Being part of Scoop Jones coming my way 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 and it’s a great spirit, positive outlook for others and if you do 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.
There isn’t an app for this.

Live, learn, and work with a community overseas.
Be a Volunteer.

peacecorps.gov