

FOOD&DINING

Chef Elizabeth Terry, the inspiration for Elizabeth on 37th.
SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS FILE PHOTO



There wouldn't be fine-dining in Savannah without Elizabeth Terry

Martha Giddens Nesbit Special to Savannah Morning News | USA TODAY NETWORK

Elizabeth Terry, the woman who opened Elizabeth on 37th restaurant in May 1981 and earned a James Beard award in 1995 for Best Chef Southeast, died Oct. 14 after a short illness on Orcas Island, Washington, in the company of her partner, Andrew, and daughters Alexis and Celeste and their families, including grandchildren Ona, 10, Skye, 15, and Orion, 16. ● For newcomers to Savannah who appreciate Savannah's fine-dining scene, you can thank Elizabeth Terry, ably assisted by her adoring husband, Michael, for paving the way for locally sourced food, beautifully prepared, and elegantly served. ● Elizabeth's story was unique. She was a female in a profession where there were few females. She was a self-taught chef in a field where credentials are important. And she insisted on putting family first in a profession that demands long hours. She exhibited a confidence in her abilities in the kitchen that she attributes to her mother, Nanee Bennett, who told her she could do anything. And, then, there was Michael, who was a star attorney but was happy to let his wife's star shine brighter than his. **See DINING, Page 2C**



Elizabeth Terry supervising guest chef Martha Nesbit
COURTESY OF MARTHA GIDDENS NESBIT

DINING UPDATES

Mediterranean, Hawaiian restaurants now open in Savannah

Laura Nwogu

Savannah Morning News
USA TODAY NETWORK

Ask anyone why they love Savannah, and there's a good chance one of the answers will boast about the city's food scene.

Every corner is bustling with dining and drinking spots that satisfy various tastes. Lucky for locals and tourists alike, there's never a shortage of spots to visit, especially when new businesses are rolling in every month.

Here is an update on recently-opened restaurants.

Recently-opened

Shuk Mediterranean

1313 Habersham St.;
shuksavannah.com

Shuk celebrated its grand opening Tuesday and guests were treated to tastes of the Mediterranean from sizzling skillet of shakshuka, bowls of

chicken shwarma and nighttime cocktails with a variety of hummus and dips.

"I've lived in Savannah about four years now, so I kind of grew in love with Savannah. I knew I wanted to stay around here but really saw a lack of this kind of food in the area," owner Alexis Levin told the Savannah Morning News back in February.

"I'm from Boston originally, and we have a lot of these offerings. My dad's also Israeli, so that really stuck out to me as wanting to produce these flavors for this growing community of an ever-changing landscape of people here."

Hours: 7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. - Until

L&L Hawaiian Barbecue

318 Mall Blvd Building 800;
hawaiianbarbecue.com

A taste of these islands has arrived in Savannah. L&L Hawaiian Barbecue opened on October 20, serving up traditional Hawaiian plate lunches to thousands of customers in a little over a

week, according to the team.

Plate lunches are a cultural melting pot of recipes that date back to wage laborers in 19th-century sugar plantations and pineapple fields, who brought rice and other leftovers to work in bento boxes.

The meal is traditionally served with two scoops of white rice, macaroni salad and your choice of protein like chicken katsu, shrimp, barbecue chicken or loco moco.

Wondering how to say tasty in Hawaiian? 'Ono.

Hours: 11 a.m. - 8 p.m., Monday-Saturday

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A variety of dips that are available at Shuk Mediterranean in Savannah, Georgia. ALICIA MAY / FOR SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS



Dining

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Elizabeth arrived in Savannah with Michael, a Harvard-educated attorney, and her daughters, Alexis, 7, and baby Celeste in 1980. They moved from Atlanta, where Michael had a thriving law practice (he had been to the Supreme Court twice before age 35) and was involved in local politics. Elizabeth operated a successful soup and sandwich shop called Thyme for You in the back of Russ McCall's Wine Shop in Lennox Square.

But after some soul-searching, the couple decided to move to Savannah – “A beautiful coastal city, full of rich history, wonderfully detailed architecture, lush vegetation, and collective attitude of preservation and welcome,” Elizabeth writes in the introduction to her cookbook, “Savannah Seasons,” published in 1996.

They wanted a lifestyle that would allow them to fully embrace family, not just work.

Driving around the city, they fell in love with a turn-of-the-century, 6,000-square-foot mansion that Elizabeth described as “a white elephant on a busy boulevard in an unsteady neighborhood filled with trees and a delightful neighbors of all backgrounds and all walks of life.”

No restaurant had ever been there before. What they envisioned were family quarters on the upper floor, and a lunch spot for Elizabeth and a law office for Michael on the ground level. Our paths crossed when friend Becky Cheatham called my office at the Savannah Morning News, where I served as lifestyle editor and food writer, to report that she had met this darling new couple who were renovating a rather dilapidated house on 37th street and intending to open a restaurant. I hustled over for an interview, and sat in the chaos and sheetrock dust thinking to myself, “This will never work.”

A Savannah institution is born

Against all odds, by May 1981, Elizabeth on 37th Street opened, serving soups, salads and sandwiches.

When Greg and Gary Butch arrived on staff in 1983, they encouraged Elizabeth to drop lunch and focus on becoming an elegant, evening-only restaurant. Michael found himself too busy with the restaurant to practice law, and so he selected the wines, greeted the guests, and managed the staff, as well as acting as Elizabeth's best cheerleader.

To create her menus, Elizabeth poured over recipes she discovered in hand-written cookbooks and kitchen notebooks at the Georgia Historical Society. She discovered that cooking in the South was not just fried fish and slow-cooked vegetables. It was also elegant and diverse, borrowing from European, African, and Native American influences and featuring the bounty of the land.

Descriptions of historic meals included high conversation, leisurely service, and plenty of good wine to drink. That was the ambiance Elizabeth wanted to create.

Of particular importance was Elizabeth's approach to the ingredients that went into each dish. She wanted to feature the best fish, shrimp, crab, oysters, and produce that could be supplied locally. She was on a first-name basis with the growers and suppliers who delivered to the restaurant's back door that faced busy Drayton Street.

She planted a lush herb garden in the front of the restaurant, and used herbs extensively in her recipes, meaning she could reduce the salt, an idea ahead of its time. She treated each ingredient in a dish with love and care, creating such combinations as Individual Quail with Oysters, Shad Stuffed with Shad Roe, Black-eyed Pea Cakes, and Stuffed Vidalia Onions. Michael fished with the Butch brothers, and their catches were often served on the restaurant menus.

Elizabeth was generous with her time and her knowledge, allowing me to come hang out and learn in the restaurant kitchen on Mondays, when Michael stripped the kitchen down and cleaned it top to bottom.

The nation begins to notice who is cooking in Savannah

It did not take long for other food writers to notice the elegant meals being served at Elizabeth on 37th. Requests for recipes began to come in from “the big three” – *Gourmet* magazine, *Food & Wine*, and *Bon Appetit*. A year after the restaurant opened, *Atlanta Magazine* described the restaurant as “the finest restaurant anywhere in Coastal Georgia,” according to Wikipedia.

In 1987, the James Beard Foundation selected Terry as the first woman chef to cook for the foundation as a Rising Star.

In 1989, she entered and won a Haggis recipe contest with the prize of a



Elizabeth on 37th Street. RICHARD BURKHART/SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS



Elizabeth and Michael Terry outside Elizabeth on 37th. COURTESY OF THE TERRY FAMILY

two-week trip to Scotland.

In 1995, she received the James Beard Award for Best Chef Southeast, and in 2005, she was awarded the Barbara Tropp President's Award, Women Chefs & Restaurateurs.

In 1996, Elizabeth and daughter Alexis spent the summer between Alexis' freshman and sophomore years at the University of Montana to produce *Savannah Seasons*, a cookbook featuring all of the recipes Elizabeth had developed through the years, which was published by Doubleday.

Elizabeth's cooking inspired other restaurants to up their game. Restaurateur Sandy Hollander had hired a young chef, Gerry Klaskala, at the Hyatt Regency, and started a fine-dining club called The Plimsoll Club in 1981, the same year Elizabeth on 37th opened. Hollander and Klaskala continued their partnership at 45 Bistro, located next to the Pirates' House, focusing on elegant California cuisine.

“Michael, Elizabeth and Gerry spent time together and enjoyed each other's company,” Hollander says. “You could say that Elizabeth paved the way for fine Southern dining because no one else was doing what she was doing.”

The restaurant developed a loyal following, including Cliff and Kathy McCurry. Cliff, director of community development for Sterling, Seacrest, Pritchard, wrote the insurance for the Terrys' house and restaurant. “We always celebrated our birthdays and anniversaries at Elizabeth's,” Cliff says. “My wife Kathy ordered the grouper with sesame-almond crust (Grouper Celeste on the menu) and I always order the special. I've been amazed at the way Greg and Gary have maintained the high standards of the restaurant.”

Making an impact in Savannah

The Terrys involved themselves fully in Savannah life, often opening the restaurant for charity fund-raising events. Michael worked to secure the Bull Street Library in its current location. They had a box at Grayson Stadium to support the Savannah Sand Gnats. Michael served as “room mom” at the girls' school, Savannah Country Day.

The Terrys joined Asbury Memorial Church, where Elizabeth made desserts for the confirmation classes and taught nutrition and cooking to low-income neighbors. Just as they had hoped, the couple had time to attend Alexis' basketball games and Celeste's cello recitals. Their “family” grew to include a staff of around 30, with whom they celebrated special occasions.

By 1998, the Terrys were ready for a new chapter. They sold the restaurant to



One of the main dining areas at Elizabeth on 37th. RICHARD BURKHART/SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS



A plaque honoring Elizabeth Terry for her “culinary artistry” from Food Arts in 1998. RICHARD BURKHART/SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS



Elizabeth Terry was received the James Beard Awards 1995 Perrier-Jouet Best American Chef: Southeast. RICHARD BURKHART/SAVANNAH MORNING NEWS

Greg and Gary Butch and agreed to stay in Savannah for a year to troubleshoot should any issues arise. The kitchen was expertly run by the husband-wife team of Kelly Yambor and Jeremy Diehl, who have maintained the high standards of fine Southern cuisine established by Elizabeth, adding their own personal stamps to new dishes.

The Terrys eventually settled in Portland, Oregon, so they could be closer to Alexis and Celeste, both of whom were living on the West Coast. Michael Terry died in 2012 after complications following surgery.

Elizabeth and I have cooked with and for each other. In 1985, she asked me to be a guest chef in the restaurant during February, typically a slow time for restaurants. Also invited were Vincent Russo and the late Ben Tucker. That night was one of the most harrowing, exhilarating nights of my life.

In 2013, I asked Elizabeth to return to Savannah to be guest chef for the first Savannah Food and Wine Festival for a benefit dinner for Bethesda Academy. She brought daughter Celeste with her to assist. We spent two hard days of cooking, one for 150 guests who attended the Bethesda event, and two days later, for 500 guests who attended the Chefs' Dinner at the Mansion on Forsyth.

As we picked through mounds of crab looking for slivers of shell, Elizabeth admitted that cooking for crowds was a thing of the past. At that point in her life,



Elizabeth and Celeste Terry COURTESY OF MARTHA GIDDENS NESBIT

she was happy to cook for family and friends, the people she cherished most.

“Since Elizabeth Terry and her family arrived in Savannah, the whole city has eaten better, and her sterling example has stimulated the kitchens of rival chefs and the palates of diners throughout the region,” wrote Pat Conroy in the *Seasons* foreword.

For that, we diners are thankful.