

# James Beard Foundation

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### THE JAMES BEARD FOUNDATION® TO UNITE OVER 150 FEMALE HOSPITALITY AND CULINARY BUSINESS LEADERS FOR THE SECOND WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

*The trailblazing event will be held September 8-10, 2024, in partnership with Houston First.*

**NEW YORK (August 13, 2024)** – The [James Beard Foundation](#)® (JBF) will host the [2024 Women's Entrepreneurial Leadership \(WEL\) Summit](#) in partnership with [Houston First](#) from September 8-10, 2024, at Hilton Americas-Houston. The event will gather over 150 of the nation's leading women business owners in hospitality and culinary entrepreneurship for two days of intensive learning, connection, and empowerment. This is only the second time JBF has held a summit of this magnitude in support of women's leadership in the industry.

The WEL Summit is an extension of the Foundation's flagship [WEL program](#), an advanced educational, training, and networking program that aims to ensure the success of and increase the number of women-owned businesses across the country. Both WEL and the WEL Summit serve a particular need for an industry facing not only ongoing economic and food supply challenges, but also gender inequality. [According to the National Restaurant Association](#), while women make up the majority of the workforce in the restaurant industry, only 34% of restaurant firms are majority owned by women.

"A key pillar of the mission of the James Beard Foundation is to push for new standards in the restaurant industry where all have the opportunity to thrive—particularly crucial for female restaurant owners who frequently do not receive the same levels of resources or support," said **Clare Reichenbach, CEO, James Beard Foundation**. "Thanks to our partners at Houston First, we are able to host this vital extension of our WEL program to provide a truly inspiring group of women the essential tools, resources, and networks required to ensure the success of their businesses and the future of the independent restaurant industry."

Over the course of two days, participants will have the opportunity to delve into a wide range of topics crucial for business success, including team management, leadership development, optimizing marketing strategies, improving profitability, scaling up business operations, leveraging personal brand identity, and more, learning from influential women from across hospitality and business. Featured speakers include:

- Mayan Bouskila, Founder and Attorney, [Legal with Mayan](#)
- Maya-Camille Broussard, James Beard Award-Nominated Chef and Owner, [Justice of the Pies](#)
- Ana Castro, James Beard Award-Nominated Chef and Owner, [Acamaya](#)
- Tiffany Derry, James Beard Award-Nominated Chef and Founder, [Tiffany Derry Concepts](#)
- Jacqueline Hensel, VP of Marketing and Communications, [COTE](#)
- Anita Jaisinghani, James Beard Award-Nominated Chef and Co-owner, [Pondicheri](#)
- Bricia Lopez, James Beard Award-Winning Chef and Co-Owner, [Guelaguetza](#)
- Dr. Anne E. McBride, VP of Programs, James Beard Foundation
- Erika Prosper, Senior Director of Customer Insights, [H-E-B](#)
- Emily Williams-Knight, CEO, [Texas Restaurant Association](#)

As the most diverse city in the country with an equally eclectic culinary landscape, JBF found an ideal partner in Houston to host this year's WEL Summit. The city and its surrounding area are home to more than 13,000 restaurants—and 10 James Beard Restaurant and Chef Award semifinalists and one nominee in 2024 alone—spanning Vietnamese, West African, traditional and modern barbeque, as well as restaurants that utilize Houston's access to fresh Gulf seafood.

“Houston First is proud to partner with the James Beard Foundation to bring the Women’s Entrepreneurial Leadership Summit to our city,” said **Michael Heckman, President and CEO of Houston First**.

“Houston is an entrepreneurial city with a diverse and robust hospitality community that includes a talent base of outstanding female leadership. We recognize the importance of events such as this to empower women, help them overcome obstacles, and provide them with an opportunity to learn from those who have achieved success. With leadership from organizations like JBF, the future of the hospitality industry will be more inclusive and equitable.”

The WEL Summit is free to attend and is open to both past and current WEL program participants, as well as former applicants. This initiative underscores JBF’s dedication to increasing opportunities and support for women business leaders in the hospitality industry.

**To learn more about the 2024 WEL Summit, please visit [here](#).** To learn more about JBF’s Women’s Leadership Programs, please visit [here](#).

*The second WEL Summit—part of the James Beard Foundation’s Women’s Leadership Programs—is hosted by the Houston First Corporation. Additional WEL Summit sponsors include French Bloom Alcohol-Free Sparkling Wines and the Texas Restaurant Association.*

*The WEL program was initiated with founding support from JBF supporter Jodie W. McLean, CEO of EDENS, one of the nation’s leading private retail real estate companies. The Foundation’s wider Women’s Leadership Programs are sponsored by Conniption Gin, Distinguished Vineyards, Enroot, Hexclad Cookware, and S.Pellegrino® Sparkling Natural Mineral Water.*

*The James Beard Foundation’s programs are supported by Capital One, the official credit card and banking partner of the James Beard Foundation; American Airlines, the official airline of the James Beard Foundation; and Windstar Cruises, the official cruise line of the James Beard Foundation.*

#### **Photo Assets**

- WEL Summit press photography selects are available [here](#) (photo credit required: © Clay Williams / Courtesy of the James Beard Foundation).

#### **About the James Beard Foundation**

The James Beard Foundation (JBF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that celebrates and supports the people behind America’s food culture, while pushing for new standards in the restaurant industry to create a future where all have the opportunity to thrive. Established over 30 years ago, the Foundation has highlighted the centrality of food culture in our daily lives and is committed to supporting a resilient and flourishing industry that honors its diverse communities. By amplifying new voices, celebrating those leading the way, and supporting those on the path to do so, the Foundation is working to create a more equitable and sustainable future—what we call Good Food for Good®. JBF brings its mission to life through the annual Awards, industry and community-focused programs, advocacy, partnerships, and events across the country. For the first time in the Foundation’s history, exceptional culinary talent, industry leaders, and visitors from NYC and beyond can experience unforgettable dining and educational programming at Platform by the James Beard Foundation—and be the first to try new food concepts at the Good To Go by JBF kiosk—inspiring food and beverage devotees for decades to come. Learn more at [jamesbeard.org](https://jamesbeard.org), sign up for our newsletter, and follow [@beardfoundation](https://twitter.com/beardfoundation) on social media

#### **About the James Beard Foundation Programs**

The James Beard Foundation’s Programs help the independent restaurant industry reach new standards around equity, sustainability, and workplace practices to ensure that all involved in its supply chain can thrive. We look to turn independent restaurant jobs into long and healthy independent restaurant careers; to expand who has access to leadership, visibility, financial stability, and capital; and to use the power of chefs for climate change mitigation and other issues that touch our food system. Our mission comes to life through training programs, policy advocacy, and harnessing the agency of chefs for change.

**About Houston First Corporation**

Houston First Corporation (HFC) is a local government corporation and the official destination marketing organization for the country's fourth largest city. In addition to serving as operator for the George R. Brown Convention Center and some of Houston's most prominent art, entertainment, and event venues, HFC is focused on promoting the city's vibrancy and rich tapestry of culture. By harnessing the city's collective energy, ambition, and creativity, including its diverse culinary scene, world-renowned performing arts, medical and space innovation, and elite filming locations, HFC is solidifying Houston as a premier national and global destination. For the latest news and info regarding HFC, visit [www.houstonfirst.com](http://www.houstonfirst.com).