

# *Standing the* TEST OF TIME

*By Vera Stewart | Photos by Amy J. Owen*

**I**n 2004, during an annual January meeting, my accountant said to me, “You must come up with a way to make money in the summer. All your profit goes to keeping your doors open in June and July.”

My days as a home economics teacher quickly came to mind and, without hesitation, I placed flyers in our café offering a great solution to parents for summer 2004. And with that, the VeryVera Cooking Camp was born. I set a reasonable goal that first year with three weeks of camp and 18 students per class. We sold out in our first year.







**Our mission is to develop culinary skills, etiquette and home management for the next generation by utilizing the VeryVera education tools and mentorship style to create confident leaders.**

Over the years, we have developed and improved the processes of all the branches of the VERA brand. I've always set a personal goal to be better than the year before — something valuable that I learned from following Nick Saban for decades. His expectation of excellence and lifelong gift of leadership have always had a strong influence on me. As I have continued to nurture the idea created from my accountant's directive, the initial focus shifted from a financial objective to a passion for mentorship in our community.

VeryVera's camp director of education, Haleigh Newman, attended our very first year of camp in 2004 at the age of eight. She maintained her interest and remained a camper every summer until 14. After high school, she







graduated from Ole Miss, worked as a teacher for two years, and then returned to Augusta to lead our camp in 2017.

After living in New York City for about six years, she returned in 2024 to become a permanent member of the team. Her role as director and her understanding of our brand and camp program make her valuable to the continued growth of this branch of our company.

Throughout the years, we have created themes that the camp children enjoy, with a concentration on cooking and crafting of a specific theme. With this summer's completion of our 22nd summer camp, and many of our advanced students in their 5th, 6th or 7th year, we saw real interest in various catering activities: a behind-the-scenes focus,

budgeting for events, and teaching about the logistics involved in executing an event. Our wedding theme also interested the young men in the class with a trip to Simon's Formal Wear to select a tuxedo and learn how to tie a bowtie and necktie. The girls had a similar experience with House of the Bride, and we made some proud dads shed a tear or two when those pictures were released on our Instagram page. All the students were given assignments that brought understanding of the service industry into perspective.

Learning about budgeting and making important decisions for a wedding event can be applied to any other special event or outing. The appreciation of what can be done four days in advance was rewarding for the







campers, especially when the events of the day were so successful. Understanding the catering costs associated with these various elements also proved very enlightening for the students.

Leadership is the strongest component of our camp, while today's mentorship component was being shaped and envisioned all along the way. Maddie Reglin, Jessica Lawson and Haleigh Newman (*pictured from left to right*) were campers, student employees, and now they are managers in our company. The young campers and counselors whom they impact today want to be just like them. For example, our camper of the week (*right*), Savannah Cranford, demonstrated above-and-beyond levels of maturity, kindness, respect and initiative in all areas of camp. ■

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*Summer camp registration goes live on December 1, and we also offer a variety of Saturday classes in the fall. For more information on VeryVera Camp, visit [veryveracamp.com](http://veryveracamp.com) or Instagram @veryveracamp.*

