

Life of the Party

IN HER NEW DINING SPACE, CHEF LENORE NOLAN-RYAN ADDS BRUNCH TO HER ROBUST CALENDAR

BY ALYSSA FISHER / IMAGES BY PATRICK CLINTON PHOTOGRAPHY

Lenore Nolan-Ryan's food career began with brunch. It was 1974, and she was 19, studying voice and piano at Butler University in Indianapolis. She loved brunch, but there weren't many options. She could dine at the top of the Hyatt or the Pancake House, but her already-refined palate craved quiches, confitures (similar to fruit preserves), biscuits and other delicate dishes.

She walked over to the Pleasant Peasant, a little restaurant where she often dined, and asked the owner if she could rent it out for brunch on the weekends. It wasn't open during the day, and she would bring in her own food and staff, plus pay a percentage.

"She said OK," Nolan-Ryan says, letting out a sharp, infectious laugh. "Crazy, right? All of a sudden, I'm doing brunches, and we're getting busier and busier and busier."

Spend an afternoon with Nolan-Ryan, owner of Lenore Nolan-Ryan Catering and Cooking School, and you'll learn she has about a million stories like this, all fueled by her zest for cooking, for entertaining, for life. She finds a way to share them all in her new Fort Lauderdale spot—3311 N. Ocean Blvd., in the Galt Ocean Plaza—a one-stop shop for pop-up dinners, tapas and wine tastings, cooking classes and, now, Bubbles and Brunch every Sunday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The brunch menu features the classics, such as quiche and eggs Benedict, as well as signature dishes, like her Artichoke Flower—creamed spinach, poached eggs, roasted tomatoes, lemon Hollandaise sauce and a butter-fried baguette. That's her favorite dish, followed by the Torta Milanese, made with French ham, Swiss chard, roasted peppers, and a spinach-and-egg omelet in puff pastry.

"Oh!" she says, interrupting her own nonbrunch thought—one of the most delicious parts about brunch is the biscuits. She's been whipping up the same recipe since the 1980s. "They're so light and fluffy," she says. "I serve them with these beautiful jam butters."

To her, the late-morning meal is a personal time—which is why hers offers an option for unlimited cocktails.

"I've never heard of a business brunch," she says, throwing her head back as she laughs. "It's a time that you gather with family, friends, your squad ... when you're at your most relaxed and happy."



Lenore Nolan-Ryan

On her cooking classes: "I don't know what I love more: people or food. For me, food is friendship. In my cooking classes, people become friends. In corporate team-building events, you're across from colleagues, and you're chopping garlic and onions ... soon you're not talking about cubicle work; it's more of, 'I never liked garlic [growing up]' ... You get to know someone when you cook with them."

On the brunch rush: "I run from doing the 'Hi, how are you?' and seating people, to going in and making the omelet. I would love to just be the line cook. It's a push—it's not stressful, but it's a push. It's got to be perfect—you've got to poach the eggs perfectly. A poached egg is like a perfect breast."

On why she enjoys catering (which she offers in and out of her dining space): "The only thing I really want to do every day is cater. Every job is a little different, the clients are different. I love that."

On her "Live to Travel, Love to Eat Series," on the 22nd of every month:

"I re-create recipes I had when I was in that city or in that time or in that restaurant. That's what I'm trying to do—take you to a destination. You just enjoy the flavors of what I'm sharing with you, and what I loved about the city. My pop-up dinners, I'll just think of something or I'll eat something or I'll go somewhere, and I'll want to do it. So I send a blast out, and we pop-up."

On her new space, after 17 years at Gina Lenore's in Lauderdale-by-the-Sea: "Here, I feel like I've landed," she says. "This is really my space. It is just the perfect size. I can do everything here. I love all of these things—I don't want to be a restaurant every day. Every day here is different. It's fun."

