



PARTY

ON A PLATE

Chef Laura Fowler Goss loves making people happy with her delicious food.

By **KAYLA LOKEINSKY** | Photos by **HOLLY FRAZIER PHOTOGRAPHY**
(Additional photos courtesy of Laura Fowler Goss)

Laura Fowler Goss was feeling sick of her office job at a transportation company, so her boss told her to take a vacation. She took his advice, and went on a year-long vacation to pursue her passion for cooking and entertaining.

“He said, ‘Go somewhere you’ve always wanted to go.’ Well, I’ve always wanted to go to culinary school,” Laura said. “So I took a vacation and went to culinary school.”

After attending culinary school, Laura was eventually able to turn her passion into a career as a caterer. Now, she is one of the most highly sought-after chefs in the area, catering events throughout North-Central Florida and also working on a team with one of the biggest stars in the food industry. With every event, she creates a party on a plate.

Following Her Heart

If you’ve ever met Laura, 32, you’ll know she loves to entertain, especially with food. Laura got her start in the kitchen when she was in middle school. She is the oldest of three children, and when her mom, Lisa, got sick, she cooked for her family. As she grew older, she took those culinary skills and turned them into parties.

“I love to throw parties,” Laura said. “As a young person out on my own I always threw a lot of dinner parties and it was always a bacon-wrapped little smokies kind of thing. It was fun and that’s where I learned to entertain and really learned to enjoy cooking to feed people in a happy atmosphere.

When Laura graduated high school in 2004, she went straight to work at a transportation company until she took her vacation in 2009 and went to culinary school at Le Cordon Bleu. After graduating in 2010, she went back to the transportation job, managing the company’s operations for five more years. Her position enabled her to travel, go to conferences and manage large-scale events, which gave her an upper hand when it came to planning her catering business. Finally, in 2015, she decided to make her passion her permanent career.

“I said, ‘Well I’ve been doing these side parties and catering on the weekends, let’s see if I can actually make a living at it,’” Laura said. “So far so good.”

After a year and a half of running her own business,



Loaded mini baked potatoes



Laura shows off her Alligator Potstickers while competing on the Blazed \$ Confused cooking competition team at the World Food Championships in Orlando in 2016.



Feta Shrimp Cucumber Canapé



One of Laura's specialties as a caterer is appetizer buffets, like this antipasto display featuring walnut chicken salad and dessert trifles. Laura's meals often focus on fresh, local ingredients. The meal pictured above includes pork tenderloin with blackberry gastrique, crispy parmesan chicken, duchess potatoes and fresh green beans.

Laura feels that by taking her time before jumping into catering professionally, she set herself up for success.

"It's kind of a roundabout way to get anywhere, but now I'm doing three or four events a week and just constantly chopping onions and washing dishes it feels like," Laura said with a laugh. "But it's fun, it's really fun, and I'm thankful for the journey that got me to where I am."

Her connection to the transportation industry actually led to her biggest culinary opportunity: to join the Guy Fieri catering team. A former client of hers from her days at the transportation company recommended her for the

position, and before she knew it she was flying to Houston to cook alongside Guy Fieri, a Food Network star and one of the most well-known chefs in the country, for the 2017 Super Bowl.

"What's on TV is absolutely real," Laura said. "He's loud and kind of bold and crazy. He's cool."

She along with a team of fellow chefs helped cater the 2017 Super Bowl, hosting a party for 2,500 people. She went with the Guy Fieri catering team to the Master's Golf Tournament, cooking breakfast, lunch and dinner for 250 people for six days. She has been in Indianapolis during football season, where Guy caters the

tailgate parties for the Colts. In 2018 she will fly out to Minneapolis for Super Bowl LII.

"Here's what's so crazy is chefs fly in from all over the country to these events and just took their asses off," Laura said. "Like 48 hours solid chopping onions. Like here's 500 pounds of onions, y'all get these things chopped kind of things.

"There's honor in doing the work and it's just really cool to be around all the other chefs doing the work," she added. "Learning from them and sharing in the misery at 3 a.m. It's good stuff."

The Best In The Business



When Laura isn't traveling the country cooking at major sporting events, she's back catering events close to home. The Branford-based chef has catered many events in Lake City, including the VIP tent at the Gateway City Beer and Wine Festival. She does a lot of

catering for community organizations and businesses, and has prepared food for countless weddings, parties and other events.

"I like the events business," Laura said. "People eat because they have to sustain their lives and they go to restaurants because it's convenient or for a number of other good reasons, but when they throw a party, it's a happy time, and that's what I really love is the celebration of it."

The food that Laura puts out is based on classic French technique and is customized for the client. Some of her most popular menu items include beef tenderloin, pork loin, sausage-stuffed mushrooms and her famous caramelized onion dip. Her menu is often based around fresh, local ingredients.

"Most clients give me some leeway with that," Laura said. "They say, 'OK this is the protein that we want, we'd rather have potatoes than rice and bring us some vegetables.' So I'm very thankful for that."

However, what Laura is most well-known for is what she calls her "little pretties."

"I love beautiful hors d'oeuvres," Laura said. "I love to fix them, I love to eat them, I love to present them, I love to serve them. I found a really cool niche in appetizer buffets. Fruit and cheese and vegetables and things like that, that nobody takes the time to do. That's super fun for me. Other caterers aren't doing it so that's a special market for me that I've slid into."

Laura's family is actively involved in her catering business. When she's working events in Gainesville, she rents a kitchen there, but when she's catering events close to home she works out of an industrial kitchen on her parent's property just south of Branford. Her mom, Lisa, helps her a lot with the cooking and behind-the-scenes work at events, while

her cousin Jessilen does a lot of the baking for her events. Also part of Laura's team is Wendy Petersen, her event manager who has been working with her for over a year.

"No matter if it's a 13-year-old's birthday party or she's dealing with corporate executives, it's the same quality across the board," Wendy said. "Laura treats everyone the same and that's what's so great about her."

In addition to her role as a caterer and chef, Laura is a wife to Matt and a mother to three-year-old AnnMarie. Although her husband isn't involved in her business, he does have a knack for cooking.

"He has no part of the catering, but what he does is all the cooking at home, which is such a blessing," Laura said. "He's constantly coming up with new things and new ideas that I kind of steal from him."

Laura wants to make sure that everyone can enjoy food made with fresh ingredients. So, she started a charity, Fowler's Fork. With a desire for all children to enjoy fresh, healthy food, she started the outreach program in an effort to teach kids how to plant, grow and harvest simple vegetables and then learn to cook their own healthy meals at her cooking camps.

As Laura continues to grow her business, she has one goal in mind: to be everyone's go-to girl.

"I really just want to be the best in the business, at least in the area," Laura said. "It's hard to compete with ingredients that we can't find locally and that sort of thing, but I really just want to be known to be at my personal top of my game, have a really incredible team and have people say if you want something beautiful and you want something tasty and you want it done professionally, call Laura."

Laura's Ricotta Canoli Pastry with Chocolate Covered Strawberry



Farm to Table

FIFTH GENERATION FARMS MARKET

Local Meat, Produce & Southern Specialties

Celebrating Women In Business

Let Us Help Simplify Life!
HOMEMADE ~ DELICIOUS

Casseroles • Take Home Dinners • Desserts • Sides • Cooked Meats
 Southern Specialties & More!

Just west of I-75 on Hwy 90
 LAKE CITY, FL • (386) 243-8335
 Mon.-Fri. 10am - 6:30pm | Sat. 9am-6pm | Sun - Closed

FOLLOW US @FifthGenFarms

whynotfresh.com

Chevron

Propane Filling Station

Drive it in and We'll Fill It Up

WE NOW CARRY AeroShell

WE HAVE ETHANOL FREE GAS

G.W. Hunter, Inc.
 1130 US Hwy 90 W • Lake City • 386-752-5890