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82-year-old 'mother of the kitchen' at Charleston's Fleet Landing retires after 2 decades

BY PARKER MILNER PMILNER@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

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Beatrice Wigfall (center front) is pictured on her last day of work at Fleet Landing in Charleston.

PROVIDED

Beatrice Wigfall remembers watching the [1940s-era naval debarkation building](#) on Concord Street transform into Charleston restaurant [Fleet Landing](#) in the early 2000s. She applied when it opened in 2004.

Wigfall, who moved from New York to Charleston in 1991 with her husband, remembers her first day. It looked like many others would over the next two decades at the waterfront restaurant.



FOOD

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BY PARKER MILNER PMILNER@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

As pantry and prep cook, Wigfall would prepare her station after arriving for a shift. She would cut chicken and flank steak for one of the restaurant's signature salads. She would fry shallots and candied pecans and make the raspberry sauce for key lime pie.



The staff at Fleet Landing hosted a retirement party for Beatrice Wigfall on her last day at the Charleston restaurant.

PROVIDED

She would say hello to Jim Epper and Deljuan Murphy, who worked with her from that first day in 2004 until her last service on June 1, 2024. As the years went on, Wigfall would set new standards for back-of-house operations at the Lowcountry seafood restaurant. She would train line cooks like Shannon Stigall, who has since climbed the ranks to become Fleet Landing's executive sous chef.

"I cried all day," said Stigall, whose family drove to Charleston from North Carolina for "Mrs. B's" last day. "She didn't realize how much she impacted and affected everyone's lives."

Al Middleton, Fleet Landing's back-of-house manager, called Wigfall the "mother of the kitchen." She would show cooks tricks for making soups and knit baby blankets for coworker's newborns. For a person small in stature, she had a lot of power in the kitchen, said Middleton, who worked with Wigfall for 19 years.



FOOD

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BY PARKER MILNER PMILNER@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

Fleet Landing has remained a downtown staple, particularly among Holy City visitors, even as the area surrounding it continues to change. In 2021, owners Weesie and Tradd Newton signed an extension that will keep the casual dining spot and watering hole at 186 Concord St. — next to the forthcoming Cooper Hotel — in place **through 2049**. As the restaurant approaches its 20th anniversary, Weesie Newton noted the many Fleet Landing employees who have stayed around for years. Wigfall, though, was the only one to work in the same position for the last 20 years, Weesie Newton said.



Fleet Landing is located at 186 Concord St. in Charleston.

FILE/STAFF

Helping coworkers like Stigall to promotions made her a key contributor to staff development, Newton said.

“With any company, a 20-year tenure is quite a long time, and that is significant,” Newton said. “(Her coworkers) felt her effects.”

The people who worked with Wigfall showered her with gifts on her last day, including an engraved bread knife. Newton said she and her friends can eat at Fleet Landing for free for the rest of her life.

“My experience at Fleet Landing was great. It gets the blue ribbon,” said Wigfall, 82. “My co-workers helped make work enjoyable. They really did make work a happier place to be.”



FOOD

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BY PARKER MILNER PMILNER@POSTANDCOURIER.COM

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