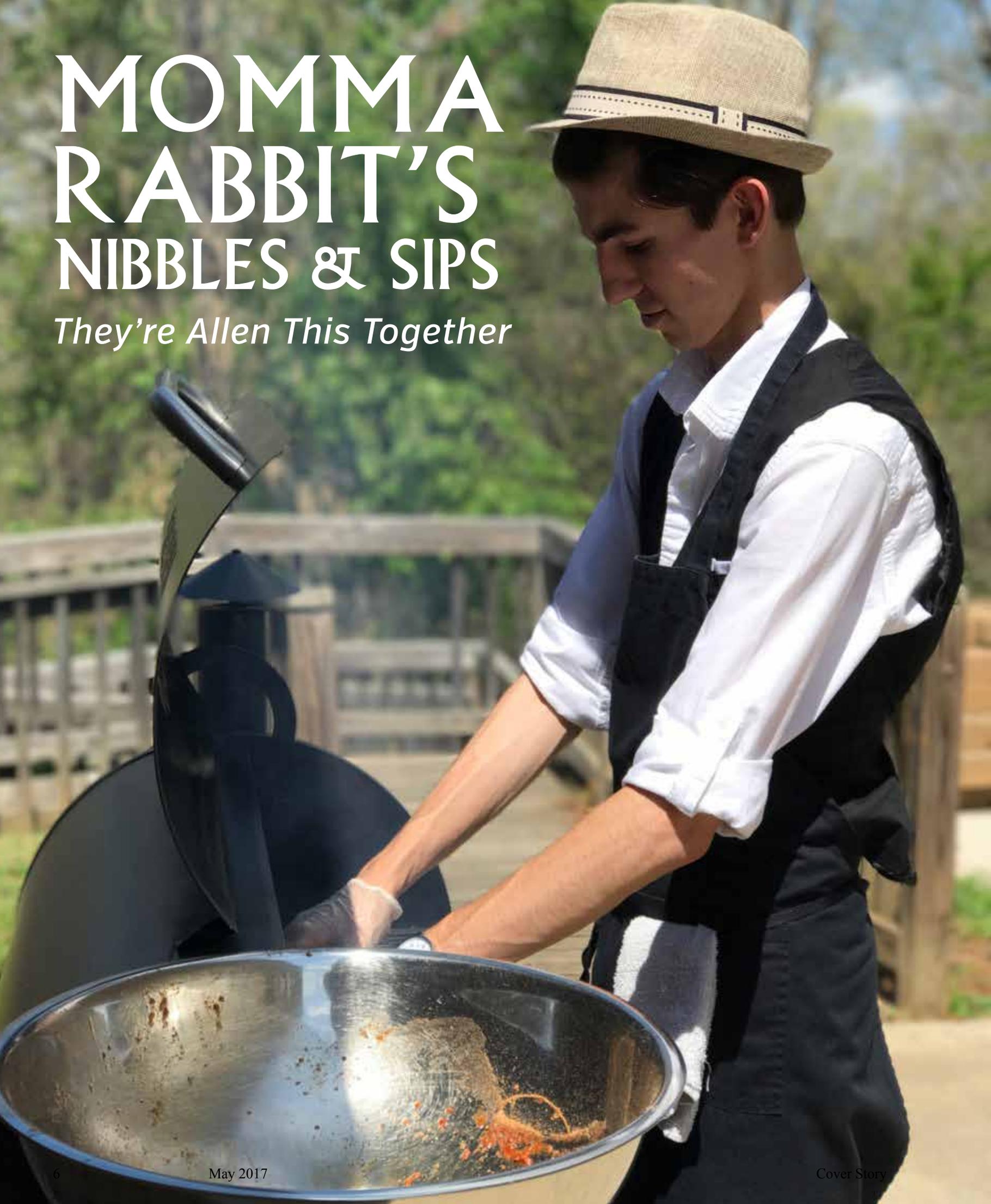


# MOMMA RABBIT'S NIBBLES & SIPS

*They're Allen This Together*



**I**t's not surprising that a restaurant named Momma Rabbit's would be owned and run by eight siblings. What is surprising is that the oldest owner is only 28, and the youngest is 14. Not only are these young siblings running a business while many are still juggling homework, they're doing it so well regulars line up out the door for a nibble and a sip. If the success of one-year-old Momma Rabbit's continues to exceed expectations, new locations may pop up all over Columbia like, well, rabbits.

The Allen family celebrated Momma Rabbit's first anniversary this past January like they do just about everything – together. In fact, togetherness is their family motto: We're Allen This Together. They've been Allen this Together since their parents, Bill and Mandy, moved their family from Marietta, GA, to an organic farm in Irmo. They wanted to instill a solid work ethic into their children and keep them from falling prey to habitual video gaming like many of today's kids. The siblings worked the land, cared for the animals, and developed a dream of eventually owning their own business — together.

“We always knew we wanted to have a family business,” Bill says, “but we didn't know what it would be. Looking back, we realize God was way ahead of us, putting pieces into place along the way.” The pieces began to fall together in 2010, when their maternal grandmother passed away and left a modest inheritance to the grandkids. With the help of their financier father and homeschooling mother, they researched businesses offering the best profit for multiple owners. The lightning bolt of inspiration struck when the top two choices came down to a dry cleaning business or a restaurant. What better business could God have prepared for an organic farming family whose daily lives centered around the dinner table than a restaurant? Not to mention that Sarah (27) had been

studying ethnic and whole foods since she was 8 years old.

Choosing their business took time. Naming it didn't. They'd name it after the one who gave them their seed money, their maternal grandmother, Sue Waring Franklin, affectionately known as Momma Rabbit. Momma Rabbit received her unusual nickname after their grandfather had enjoyed a particularly big day of business and declared himself “Daddy Rabbit” to the group of teenagers who



filled their house that evening. The kids then declared her “Momma Rabbit,” and the nickname stuck.

The siblings then tackled the next items in their business plan: knowledge and experience. Will and Sarah earned culinary degrees from the University of South Carolina. They worked, along with Spencer (24) and James (21), at area restaurants such as Outback and Cracker Barrel in Columbia, and The Other Pancake House and Everyday Gourmet in Lexington. In each restaurant, they learned valuable lessons that went beyond the basics of scheduling and plating. They learned how to build a faithful following by treating patrons as guests, not customers.



### By Jean Wilund

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# Momma Rabbit's

Nibbles & Sips

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 mommarabbits



Will says prayer was their most important work while they waited for the right time and location. And God answered. He opened the door when the owners of Everyday Gourmet closed theirs. The Allens bought Everyday Gourmet in November 2014 and moved the family from their farm in Irmo to a house in Lexington. They continued to work the restaurant as Everyday Gourmet while they completed the renovations and worked out the kinks of new ownership.

By the time opening day arrived on January 4, 2016, the Allens had created a warm, homey atmosphere, complete with comfy chairs and a sofa nestled around a small fireplace. They converted an antique Hoosier cabinet into a guest-friendly coffee bar, complete with vintage cups. A tiny wicker table and chairs encourage little ones to let mom and dad linger over their coffee and a slice of Le Vie En Rose cake or a bowl of naturally sweetened, homemade ice cream. One regular, who calls himself “Dine and Dash Dan,” feels so at home he placed a framed photo of himself next to an Allen family photo in the bathroom. It remains there today. Before Dan or other guests dash off, they can raid the family freezer tucked in a corner, choosing from an assortment of ready-to-cook take-home meals.

Like most families, the Allen's have had their share of mishaps, such as the Saturday Brunch Grand Opening Egg Debacle. The week of their Brunch Opening, Will guesstimated eight dozen eggs would cover their needs. When the first order came in

for four Eggs Benedicts, they could find only seven eggs in the refrigerator. They needed eight. Earlier that morning Sarah and Mandy had used the other 89 eggs to bake quiches and German pancakes.

In true *Allen this Together* fashion, Sarah served their guests the seven eggs while Daddy Bill rushed to the store and bought every available carton. Flying through the back door of the restaurant, he tossed an egg to John, who caught it, cracked it into the poaching pan, then slid the cooked egg onto a plate. Sarah snatched the plate from John, ladled on the hollandaise sauce, and handed it off to Will, who whisked it onto the table before the guest had even finished his first egg. The brunch opening ended well, and Will learned to order 30 dozen eggs per brunch, not eight.

With Momma Rabbit's now in their second year, the siblings continue to be *Allen this Together*. **Will** (28) serves as the general manager, handling all things financial and greeting guests with his confident, infectious smile. **Sarah** (27), the only girl among the siblings, works her creative magic on the menus, cocktails, and gourmet desserts, such as her elegant champagne cake, *An Affair to Remember*. **Spencer** (24) runs the kitchen with skill and efficiency, juggling the continual rush of orders despite tight cooking space.

**James** (21), the singer and artist in the family, helps whenever and wherever his schedule allows.

**Webb**, next in birth order, passed away in 2010 at age 13, one month after their grandmother, Momma Rabbit. The siblings consider Webb one of the owners, because he will always be their brother. **John** (18), glides through the kitchen with the smooth moves of a



dancer, cooking up his famous Eggs Benedict when he's not running their catering department, which Will says he took from "Zero to Hero." He enjoys crooning for their Facebook page with Sarah and the other *Momma Rabbit Dingalings*, Kara Rabon and Bri Benedict.

**George** (16), a quiet, gentle giant and walking encyclopedia, works on dish and prep and serves as a line guy, building the orders and sending them out – when he's not studying. **Richard** (14), is the youngest, but Sarah says he has a "greater work ethic than most adults." He works prep and is perfecting Eggs Benedict as well as algebra and history. He runs a tight ship in the kitchen, but loosens up for ballet and tap after hours.

**Daddy Bill**, a full-time financier with US Bank helps in the restaurant whenever

needed and loves to share their testimony with customers of how God brought them to this unique opportunity. **Momma Mandy**, with her French beret atop her short-cropped hair, jokes about how she got sucked into helping prepare meals. She's become a favorite fixture in the restaurant and enjoys interacting with their guests.

What's next for Momma Rabbit's? A reality show? They've been approached. Perhaps a second location? Or maybe Momma Rabbit's Fine Dining and Ballroom Dancing. They don't know yet. They say they'll decide once they're all out of high school. Whatever they choose, they know God will continue to lead them as he has from the start, and they'll be *Allen This Together*. **ROC**

