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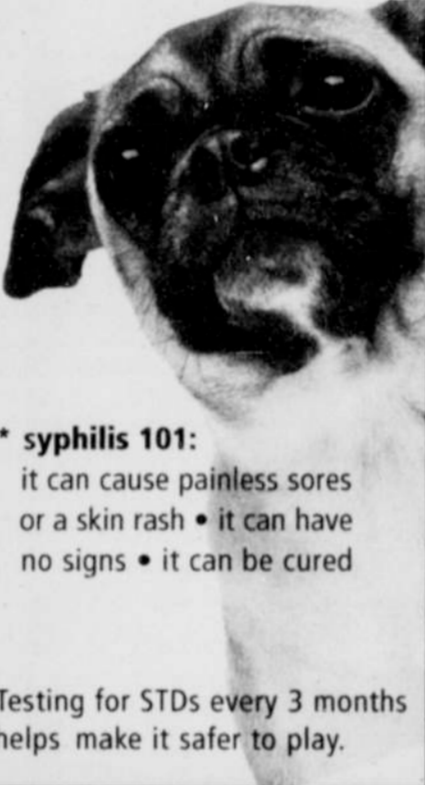
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**My Place or Yours?**

Dinner at My House for Our House gets everyone involved

by Malka Geffen

**F**ourteen years ago, an inspired group of Our House of Portland staff and volunteers found a unique, grassroots way to raise money. Dinner at My House for Our House involves a wide variety of people who support the vital services that Our House provides through a tremendous amount of fun, entertainment and, of course, food.

"A dedicated and creative group of hosts and chefs open their homes and restaurants to throw parties ranging from six to 75 guests," says Jennifer Niederloh, events manager at Our House. "They range from barnyard hoedowns to intimate, formal, multicourse affairs—many with live entertainment." Tickets to attend these dinner parties range from \$75 to \$150. According to Niederloh, the series raised \$113,000 for Our House last year, and \$120,000 is this year's goal.

According to honorary chairwoman Lisa Schroeder, chef and owner of Mother's Bistro and Mama Mia Trattoria, guests and hosts "are part of a collective of individuals that are simultaneously giving, receiving and enjoying."

Most people participate in the event for the love. "The need for a facility like Our House in our community is great," says Charlie Frasier, co-host with Richard Lawson for the "Bring Back Those Burgers!" dinner party. "When people are dealing with HIV/AIDS, it is important to give them as much care and comfort as possible."

Lawson and Frasier, with celebrity chef Nancy Lee of Nancy's Kitchen in the Pearl, are hosting the biggest dinner this year by opening up Lawson's home to 75 guests Oct. 21. According to Lawson, their dinner sold out last year, and their goal is to sell out again this year.

"Our emphasis is on those famous burgers that were the king of food in American cuisine from the 1950s through the 1970s," he says. "We try to emulate the burger emporiums like Yaws Topnotch and Jolly Jean's. Nancy is the chef descendant of those places."

In addition to '50s décor and music, Lawson's home, according to Frasier, is reason enough to get in on this special evening. "The big seller here is Richard's home itself," he says. "The 6,000-square-foot Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired home offers an incredible art collection and awesome views of the Columbia River."

According to Lawson, this dinner is the complete antithesis to what is vogue in dinner parties. "Doing something different is a treat. We captured a uniqueness no one else offers. Plus, it's hard to do a five-course dinner for 75 people." While others are more comfortable with formal and less inclusive ways of giving, Lawson says, "Maximizing the collection of money with our resources at hand is a good way to approach this."

Event co-chairmen Bob Cramer and Allen



Richard Lawson (left) and Charlie Frasier get ready to host their '50s feast as part of Dinner at My House for Our House.


Simmons can attest to the value of participation. "It's so worthwhile," says Cramer. "Because we've spent most of our lives running our business [Flowers by Dorcas], we didn't have as much time to volunteer. Once we retired, Our House became our passion." According to Cramer, it's not only the wonderful people who reside at Our House, but also the people on the staff who are so upbeat that make them want to do all they can.

"Last year, one woman bought all eight tickets for a dinner we hosted," says Cramer. "A group of eight women in their 60s who were all college friends came for one of their annual get-togethers. They're all bringing their husbands to the dinner at our beach house this year!"

Cramer and Simmons will hold an old-fashioned gourmet picnic, "Sea, Sand and Surf," July 23 at their house overlooking Haystack Rock at Cannon Beach. For \$85, 20 guests can enjoy a summer afternoon of friendship, the music of the Bossa Boys steel drum band and homemade ice cream.

Other dinner parties of interest include "Wanda's Wild Night at Crush" hosted by Woody Clarke, Mitch Calhoun and friends Oct. 15. For \$120, 10 guests will be tantalized by a five-course, farmer's market fresh dinner of Northwest seafood and produce. Throughout the evening, Wanda, Crush's own "drag witch," will delight with her Tarot, potions and charms.

You won't want to miss John Hannana and Ralph Arnold III's "Faites Simple." For \$150, 10 lucky guests will indulge their senses Nov. 11 at Villa Alta Foresti. Souffles Renverses, Coq au Vin, champagnes...it's all good, oui?

With more than 60 different public dinner parties ranging in size, menu, theme, venues, celebrity chefs and entertainment, you will have no problem finding one that will suit your fancy. You might even get it in your head to host your own next year! 

For more information about DINNER AT MY HOUSE FOR OUR HOUSE visit [www.ourhouseofportland.org/dinnerseries](http://www.ourhouseofportland.org/dinnerseries). To make reservations call 503-736-9276. Many dinners sell out quickly.

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