

Robert Reynolds

At 68, Robert Reynolds is the grand poobah of his own Portland-based culinary school: Chefs Studio. But to many, Reynolds is the high priest of Portland's food culture. It's not just that he is an accomplished chef and teacher—Reynolds has forged a relationship to food that's uniquely his own.

"In some ways I backed into being a cook," says Reynolds, whose experience and training was in education. "I found myself at a certain point in my career when it was difficult to find work. I told myself having nothing was like having everything and gave myself permission to do whatever mattered to me. When I looked at what I liked, cooking was at the top of the list," he says. Reynolds made the move from teaching—he was a Carnegie Fellow in early education—to teaching food, turning to Josephine Araldo in San Francisco and Madeleine Kamman in France for guidance.

Not one to peg himself as teacher, chef or artist, Reynolds prefers all three. "I like the idea of the three as one, a sort of trinity," he says. "Cooking, which is the work of a chef, is supported by artistic ideas, and as a teacher I try to impart that thinking to others who aspire to excellence." And excellence is what's ultimately on the menu at his Southeast Chefs Studio, where students enroll in an eight-week course designed to prepare them to become professional chefs.

His sexuality, and how it relates to the

kitchen, is beyond labels, too. "The challenges of being out in the kitchen perhaps all blend into giving the best to who I am, what I do," says Reynolds. "Nothing untoward ever came to me because I'm gay. It has always been a fuel that drives me to go places in my mind, do things that might not happen if I weren't gay."

A seasoned world traveler, Reynolds observes, "The more I have gone to France, the more I see France here. I shop at Sheridan's Market and am presented with six different local butters. We have oceans and rivers, forest to forage, dairy, beef, lamb, chickens, wheat, fruit and orchards. Tell me what we don't have?"

"Portland is Oregon," continues Reynolds. "Oregon is beautiful, rich in resources and unlike other places. ... The weather shapes our resourcefulness. We eat in each other's houses; we know basically what good food is, and that the most important part of food is feeding ourselves on a daily basis. ... The underlying values are permanent."

To Reynolds, Oregon shapes the culinary scene, not the other way around. "Trends imply things that come and go, and that means change," he says. "I love change but try not to forget that local products are our strength, the thing not to lose sight of. I'm of the school of cooking with an Italian spirit that says, 'Look at what this is' rather than with the message, 'Look at what I've done.'"

Chefs Studio, 2818 SE Pine St., 503-233-1934 or thechefstudio.com.

Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

Third Annual Dining Out for Life in Portland seeks growth, increased funds for area HIV/AIDS services

BY RYAN J. PRADO

Three and a half years ago, a fundraising idea was proposed to Partnership Project executive director Julia Lager-Mesulam during a staff retreat. The premise, raising awareness and money for HIV/AIDS services through the generosity of local restaurants, sounded like an excellent idea.

A short time later, Lager-Mesulam outlined the concept during a meeting of area executive directors, only to find that the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's HIV Day Center was already looking into something nearly identical—and international at that.

And so, in 2009, the two HIV service organizations joined forces on Portland's first Dining Out for Life event. And come Thursday, April 28 in restaurants across the city, organizers are hoping for

the biggest turnout yet.

Dining Out for Life International began in 1991, created by an Action-AIDS volunteer in Philadelphia. Now produced in more than 55 cities throughout the United States and Canada, the event boasts some 3,500 restaurants that participate in donating a portion of their proceeds—usually 20-30 percent from each check—to a local HIV services charity. Nearly \$4 million is raised every year, and the money generated in each city stays in that city.

Portland's Partnership Project and EMO's HIV Day Center—Portland's beneficiaries as well as organizers—were on the charitable money in assuming Dining Out for Life would work in Portland. With both a strong foundation of HIV/AIDS programs and a teeming

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—Portland Monthly, March, 2011

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