

restaurant scene, the marriage couldn't have been more perfect. But as with any new endeavor, Portland's DOFL is still a small entity—the product of Partnership Project staff moonlighting as DOFL organizers on top of their regular duties. Lager-Mesulam says that other cities have full-time development departments aimed exclusively at DOFL each year. For now, though, she says they're happy with the growth they've achieved in the first three Out-ings.

"We're slowly building and building, and this is what we can really manage and do well," explains Lager-Mesulam, who notes that participating restaurants have gone up from 16 the first year to 28 so far in 2011. "We want the restaurants to succeed, and of course we want to succeed and put on a good event for people. It's Portland, and there are so many restaurants, so it could be really huge. Maybe one day it will be."

The larger DOFL event has benefited from celebrity spokespersons Ted Allen—of Food Network's *Chopped*, and formerly of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*—and actress Pam Grier (*The L Word*, *Jackie Brown*). Allen's passionate involvement with the event stems from a desire to bring awareness to the fact that the HIV/AIDS crisis is not over, and that money for research and treatment is still desperately needed.

"Republicans in Congress are trying to shove through reckless, ideologically driven budget cuts in domestic programs that will

have no meaningful impact on the deficit whatsoever, but would devastate a huge swath of important programs," says Allen. "And this, at a time when the country is struggling to recover from the recession, and people who used to be volunteers at food banks and soup kitchens now are looking to those organizations to feed their own families. It is more important than ever for those of us who are able to donate time and resources to do so."

The first year of DOFL in Portland raised \$10,000, while 2010's totals reached \$15,000. That amount of money isn't huge in the bigger picture of the Partnership Project's and Day Center's respective budgets, but the organizations split the money evenly and utilize the funds to expand on services that federal grant and health system dollars don't cover.

"We're primarily grant funded, and federal dollars that come through the county and the state are dwindling," explains Lager-Mesulam. "We've seen a decrease and have had to make some staff cuts. Health systems are having budgetary problems, so we're seeing an increase in services—or a need—and a decrease in funding."

Programs like Partnership Project's Medical Case Management and Nursing Case Management programs, which provide assistance to patients who have trouble adhering to medications regimens, are given new life by

DOFL funds. Part of that service includes a transportation program, which provides clients with bus tickets, gas cards and cab rides to get to critical appointments such as medical, mental health, dental, substance abuse, housing and support groups.

Partnership also offers a Prevention Program, partially funded by DOFL, which provides risk reduction counseling to people who are HIV negative as well as individual one-on-one counseling for those at high risk of

acquiring HIV. Also assisted is the organization's annual Thanksgiving Meal Program, which last year provided 72 families with full holiday meals.

Some restaurants in Portland have been with the DOFL cause since the beginning, including West Café, a gay-owned eatery in Southwest Portland.

"It's been three years now and slow growing," says Sean Concannon, co-owner of West Café. "Nonetheless, every little bit counts. This year I am hopeful that PDX will rally around this cause."

Restaurants interested in participating have until the day of the event to sign on, and Lager-Mesulam hopes for a big push as the date nears for this vital fundraiser. She notes the generosity from all volunteers and restaurants as being crucial to DOFL's success.

"We want to empower and create community," says Lager-Mesulam. "Our big reason in doing this is about awareness—to have people discussing HIV at some point during the day, during the year, when they normally might not. It's part of the conversation, and we shouldn't forget."

Dining Out for Life takes place Thursday, April 28 at participating restaurants. For a full list of restaurants, visit diningoutforlife.com/portland. Twenty to thirty percent of your bill will be donated directly to the Partnership Project and EMO's HIV Day Center. For more information, visit ohsu.edu/partnership or emoregon.org.



Queer Eye guy: Ted Allen, celeb spokesperson for the national DOFL cause

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