

NapervilleSun

'The people are always so generous'

Cuisine for a Cause once again a success

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By DAVID SHAROS For Sun-Times Media

Motorists cruising along Interstate 88 on Saturday night probably didn't notice anything unusual at Tellabs corporate headquarters on Diehl Road. But even before darkness fell on the city, there was a party going on.

Naperville Cares launched its seventh annual Cuisine for a Cause event, a major fundraiser that last year netted a record \$118,000. The evening included a sampling of cuisine from 25 Naperville-area restaurants, along with other vendors offering wine and beer tastings. Guests paid \$85 to attend and were allowed to claim all but \$25 of the admission as a tax deduction, making the evening a fairly inexpensive night out.

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Chef Al Tineo from the City Gate Grille serves up a sample of the lamb to Ron Krupp of Lisle during the Cuisine for a Cause event Saturday at Tellabs in Naperville.

(Corey Minkanic/For Sun-Times Media)

"I have been to this all seven years, and it's wonderful to see how this has grown since the early days when it was held at the City Hall," said Naperville resident Brad Brehm, a former employee with Amoco before it became BP. "The raffle, the food and drinks -- it's all great. And there are people here you only get to see once a year."

Newcomer to this year's event The City Gate Grill served up succulent lamb chops with a citrus dressing as guests first entered. Chef Al Tineo said the New Zealand chops reflected the fresh and organic products the City Gate features.

"We support a lot of community events and are happy to be a part of this fundraiser," he said. "We just got this meat in today. We always serve select meats we receive on a daily basis."

In addition to taste portions of favorite restaurant dishes, the night also featured musical entertainment and an open bar, as well as silent and live auctions. A new twist this year was a "Best of Live" auction event, where participants paid \$50 for one of 200 tickets that were sold before the auction. One

Two days before the event, Executive Director Janet Derrick said approximately 500 guests had already registered for this year's fundraiser -- a number Derrick said was solid, given the state of the economy. Saturday night, Derrick said her estimate of those attending and the proceeds were holding steady.

"Last year was a record year for us, and the money we made was far more than we expected when we did our budget," she said. "When we made plans for this year, we wanted to be a little more conservative. We're hoping to be somewhere around \$110,000."

The evening came packaged as a sort of a semi-formal affair as guests in dresses, coats and ties mingled with wine glasses and caught up with old friends.



Guests gather for the food tasting at Cuisine for a Cause.

(Corey Minkanic/For Sun-Times Media)

ticket holder was later chosen before the live auction began and had his choice of any item before the bidding began. There was also separate auction for Apple's new iPad device.

Derrick said total money collected last year during the evening portion of the event was more than \$54,500, including revenue from both the silent and live auction, all raffles, bar tips and centerpiece sales. This year the city of Naperville also donated \$20,000 from its SECA branch (Special Events and Cultural Amenities Fund).

Mayor A. George Pradel, who has also attended all seven Cuisine for a Cause events, said the mission of Naperville Cares is even more important than ever and that he plans to ask the City Council to pledge even more.

"This organization provides immediate service when people need it, and it fills so many of the needs that are not being met," Pradel said. "They make their services so accessible for people."

Another important guest Saturday night was Barbara Dinon, 83, who founded Naperville Cares. She reflected on the growth of the organization and its early modest office as well as the history of the Cuisine event.

"It's wonder to think of how we came from such a small space to the place we have now and also to offer a beautiful benefit like this," Dinon said.

"The people of Naperville are always so generous."