

'Cuisine for a Cause' tasty way to help those in need

By Bob Smith | Daily Herald Staff

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This is your stomach speaking.

I thought we should have a little talk while you think about attending the sixth annual Cuisine for a Cause to support Naperville CARES.

First, you know me. You start talking about cuisine and my juices really start flowing.

For me, heaven looks a lot like this: Chefs from 30 of Naperville's best restaurants - from Angeli's to Zaidi's - offering samples of their signature dishes and serving them from 7 to 10:30 p.m. Saturday, April 25, in the atrium at Tellabs, 1415 W. Diehl Road.

Toss in an open bar and wine tasting and I've gotta tell you, it's enough to make me do a couple flips.



Naperville CARES Executive Director Janet Derrick says she's hoping this year's "Cuisine for a Cause" will raise about \$90,000 to help individuals and families facing economic crisis.

Want to know what's even better? When you're done sampling all that great food and nibbled on a couple desserts, you can sit back and give me a satisfied pat and know you've not only made my day, but you've helped a volunteer-driven organization - Naperville CARES - that assisted nearly 600 people last year who found themselves in economic crisis.

The folks at CARES have been doing that - helping neighbors in need attain self-sufficiency and even avoid homelessness - for 10 years now.

The group started as a grass-roots organization of religious congregations and individuals trying to help low-income families and has expanded its services to include an emergency fund program, car donations, a rent deposit program, case-management services and referrals.

That takes a fair amount of money, of course, and Executive Director Janet Derrick says this year's Cuisine for a Cause, with its \$85 tickets, probably will raise about \$90,000.

"If we can do what we did last year, we'll be in great shape," she says. "We're optimistic that we'll be able to do that."

Derrick says there's room for 650 diners and organizers are pretty pumped about the new venue at Tellabs. For the past few years the party was at Northern Illinois University's Naperville campus and Derrick says it was very nice, but as the number of participating restaurants grew (there's a record number this year) it started to get a little cramped.

(I know you don't always appreciate my sense of humor, like when I gurgle in a quiet room, but any time we stomachs can write a paragraph that includes the words "pumped" and "cramped" it just cracks us up).

This will be a little hard to believe when you stroll into the atrium and see how fancy everything looks, but the first Cuisine for a Cause was pretty much a spaghetti dinner held in a church basement. It raised about \$1,500 and everyone was thrilled, but they also thought maybe they could do even better.

Shortly after that, organizers headed over to My Chef Catering in Naperville and started working with owner Karen Garlough, who happens to be an event planner by trade and now serves both on the CARES board of directors and as the Cuisine chairwoman.

The next year the fundraiser generated about \$35,000 and organizers have never looked back.

Garlough says she and about 25 volunteers on 10 committees spent the past nine months preparing for this year's event. She says it's really fun because those volunteers "just set the bar so high and every year they raise it a little more."

"The coolest part is working with the committee members," she says. "They're so committed and we all have the same goal, the same mission."

In addition to the food, there will be plenty of entertainment, much of it supplied by area students, and a silent auction that includes a chance to play golf at the redesigned Naperville Country Club and what Derrick calls some "fabulous dinner packages."

Figuring out the best way to approach the evening can be a little tricky, Garlough says, because all the restaurants are engaged in a "friendly competition" to set up the most attractive table with the most captivating food.

Derrick suggests you "scope things out" before digging in. Garlough says, "you have to pace yourself."

That's good advice, but as your stomach I feel obligated to offer a tip of my own: consider stretch pants.

If you go

What: Sixth annual Cuisine for a Cause

Who: Presented by Naperville CARES and My Chef Catering; sponsored in part by Van Kampen Investments

When: 7-10:30 p.m. Saturday, April 25

Where: Tellabs, 1415 W. Diehl Road, Naperville

Cost: \$85

Info: (630) 369-0200 or NapervilleCARES.org.

Who's involved

Here's a look at restaurants and others participating in this year's Cuisine for a Cause:

Angeli's, Arbor Vitae Cafe, Cabernet & Company, Catch Thirty-Five, City Club, David's on Jefferson Hill, Distinctive Cork, Downtown Naperville Cold Stone Creamery, Flat Top Grill, Gelati, Heaven on Seven, House of Emperor, Hugo's Frog Bar and Fish House, Indian Harvest, Kiku Japanese Steakhouse, Kosta's Mediterranean Cafe, Le Chocolat Du Bouchard, Lynfred Winery/Tasting deVine Cellars, Maggiano's Little Italy, Meson Sebika, My Chef Catering, Quigley's Irish Pub, Raffi's on 5th, Riva, Sugar Toad at the Arista, Sullivan's Steakhouse, Ted's Montana Grill, The Melting Pot, Timpano Chophouse, Trader Joe's, Walker's Charhouse, Whole Foods Market, World Market, Wine Styles, Zaidi's