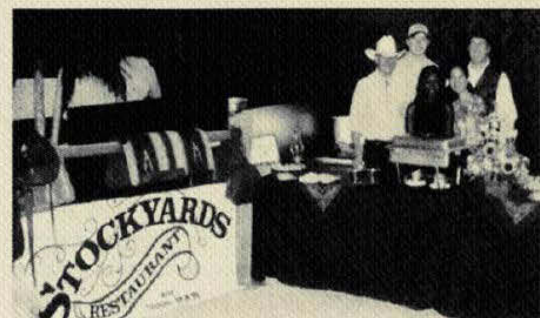




Avanti serves from their restaurant away from restaurant at Zoofari 2001



The Stockyards crew at last year's Zoofari.

# Doing Good by Cooking Well

BY MARY ELLEN COLLINS

IT'S A FAMILIAR SCENE at Valley events. An organization's president addresses a crowd of people who have deep pockets.

"...and before we continue with our festivities, please join me in a round of applause to thank Restaurant XX for donating this fabulous food!" The chef trots out of the kitchen and the owner stands at his table and waves. What are they thinking? Was it worth it to donate two hundred dinners to this charity?

Numerous non-profit organizations compete not only for the same individual donors, but also for the same vendors to donate goods and services to their events. Mark Tarbell, owner of Tarbell's and Barmouche, has two staff members who work almost exclusively on managing charities' requests.

With causes ranging from battered women and homeless children to cancer research and scholarship aid, how do restaurant owners decide who gets a "Sure, we'll help.," and who gets an "I'm sorry, we can't.?"

Do they base their choices on doing favors for friends, supporting causes that fit their personal interests, or assessing the potential public relations benefits?

Brian Adams, Partner and Director of Operations for American Restaurant Group, says, "We consider whether we think it's a good cause, we look at what the cost will be, and of course...press is a factor." Jilly's recently hosted a major fundraiser for the Salvation Army's Northern Arizona fire relief efforts. A party there in September will benefit the Boys and Girls Club.

Eddie Matney, owner of Eddie Matney's, also considers a combination of factors.

"There's no cause that's not a good one, but my family is particularly involved in children's causes. We look at the organization and how severe their need is. . .and there is a business aspect also. If the volunteers or staff of the organization support our restaurant, I support them."

Tarbell gives the nod to local organizations that focus on his own interests: children, education, and the arts.

And Matt McMahon, Joint Venture Partner with Outback Steakhouse, adds a practical consideration. "It also depends on how well-organized a charity is. Someone who asks us to donate all the food for a golf tournament that's taking place in two weeks is probably not going to get a positive response."

Most restaurants' charitable activities combine altruism with good business sense. There's a humanitarian sensibility that says "we'll help because it's a worthwhile cause" coupled with a for-profit perspective that says, "this will enhance our reputation in the community" or, "they help us, we help them."

*"Phoenix...made us 'celebrity chefs' and it's up to us to give back what we can."*

*Eddie Matney*

Adams prefers to host events at his restaurants, rather than participating in off-site affairs. "We can control the quality of the event when we're working out of our own kitchens." And the payoff is better: "It doesn't hurt to get people into your restaurant, in the process of doing a good deed, that might come back and spend money."

Tarbell says, "I do this because I feel it's my duty as a citizen of Phoenix, and because I'm fortunate that I can do it."

According to McMahon, Outback's charity involvement is a way to reciprocate the community's support.

"We do this because the community is the reason for our success. I think we have an obligation to help whomever we can, and the biggest pay-off we get is that we then share in the well-being of the community."

Amy Barwegen, Director of Media and Public Relations for the Phoenix Zoo, works with more than sixty restaurants, wineries and microbreweries for the annual Zoofari fundraiser.

"We raise more than \$350,000 a year for children's programming at the Zoo, which we couldn't do without our vendors. Each company gives us \$5,000-\$10,000 worth of time, service, and products; and they get to participate in a great event where more than 2,000 attendees sample their food and beverages."

Are there challenges specific to working with non-paying clients? Adams says that most are "not as demanding" as paying customers and exhibit more goodwill during the negotiations; and Matney feels fortunate that "the charities we work with always show us the respect we deserve."

The flip side of that perspective comes from organization representatives who mention more labor-intensive discussions as being an expected part of working with restaurateurs who donate their services.

John Collins, former Arizona State University West Vice Provost, whose office produces Courtyard Cafés, an annual scholarship benefit, explains.

"When the meal is a donation, the vendor wants to know more than menu, budget, and the number of attendees. They ask about the fundraising purpose, the demographics of the guest list, and what kind of public recognition we'll be able to provide. These are all legitimate questions – it just takes longer to work out the details."

Barwegen cites overwhelmingly positive interactions with the Zoofari vendors, but recounts an occasional snag along the way, i.e., last-minute no-shows, and cooking school students who packed up and left halfway through the event because "they had to study for a test." Fortunately, the "you get what you pay for" axiom is the exception rather than the rule in local restaurant-charity relationships.

Elaine P. Maimon, Provost of Arizona State University West, echoes McMahon's description of Outback Steakhouse as a valued community partner. For the past two years, Outback has donated 400-500 dinners for the University's scholarship gala.

"The donation of the Courtyard Cafés dinner from Outback Steakhouse makes it possible for ASU West to put the focus where it belongs at our fund-raiser – on raising money for scholarships. Outback's gift allows us to net more funds for the cause, but, even more important, their sponsorship sends a message of community support that exceeds the cost of the food."

McMahon also cites an unexpected benefit that stems from the fact that Outback staffers donate their time at these events.

"It's extremely rewarding to see young people so willing to

volunteer at the events we support – we never have a problem getting enough help. The staff works hard at a charity event, and comes back to the restaurant energized, with a real feeling of ownership in their community."

Tarbell describes the benefit of working with organizations such as Phoenix Children's Hospital and Home Base as being "a chance to build a better future for the people here."

In a post-September 11 environment that has focused people's philanthropy on those who were most immediately affected by that tragedy, raising money for local causes becomes even more challenging. Phoenix is fortunate to have civic-minded business owners who continue to answer the call, but Tarbell also encourages newcomers to get involved.

"I always advise new restaurant owners to choose and work on behalf of several causes they feel strongly about. It's a great way for them to become known while helping organizations that really need help."

Matney stresses the fact that successful independent restaurateurs in particular owe a debt to the community. "Phoenix and Arizona have embraced us and made us celebrity chefs, and it's up to us to give back what we can."

Whatever the motivating factor, local restaurant/charity partnerships illustrate how this kind of joint venture can serve both parties well.

Good food, good deeds, good business, goodwill....and benefits all around. ■

## CHEFS PERFORM, COMMUNITY BENEFITS

BY RUBEN KOBE

In October alone, three elaborate evenings will feature Valley chefs and raise money for local causes.

### FORKS AND CORKS

One event particular strikes close to home for Serving Arizona readers. The inaugural staging of Forks and Corks on October 11 at the Arizona Biltmore Pavilion will benefit The Arizona Restaurant and Hospitality Association Foundation (ARAF) and Arizona Hotel and Lodging Association Foundation, as well as the Boys and Girls Clubs of Metropolitan Phoenix.

While local chefs are unusually generous in providing meals to benefit a myriad of worthy causes, this time they will be supporting their own. ARAF offers educational programs to food service operators and employees, as well as culinary students hoping to graduate to a position in the restaurant business.

Six of the Valley's best known and most lauded chefs will participate. John Zaner, Executive Chef, The Arizona Biltmore, will present New Zealand Rack of Lamb with chanterelle bordelaise; Eddie Matney will serve his Shrimp Arugula and Olive Salad and Gregory Casale of Gregory's World Bistro will offer Five Spice Quail with fresh ginger chutney.

James Beard award nominee Mark Tarbell, of Tarbell's and Barmouche, will provide hors d'oeuvres including Eggplant Caponata in phyllo cups and Big

Eye Tuna and Cucumber with wasabi. Robert McGrath, of Roaring Fork, was named the James Beard Foundation's Best Chef: Southwest in 2001; McGrath will serve Duckling Empanadas and Smoked Colorado Trout on fennel pollen crackers. RoxSand Scocos of RoxSand, won the same James Beard Foundation award in 1999, and will end the evening with Macadamia Nut Charity Torte with coconut ice cream.

Provide wine pairings with each course, Barbara Werley is Master Sommelier for The Four Seasons Resort and one of just ten female Master Sommeliers world-wide.

This is an evening designed for restaurant owners and foodies. The event's guests will register to win an all expense paid trip to Aspen for the 2003 Food and Wine Magazine 21st Annual Classic. That chance, along with the opportunity to support restaurant education, while sampling the fare of some of the best chefs in town, make this one hard to pass up.

Tickets are available at [www.forksandcorks.com](http://www.forksandcorks.com) or 602-528-FORK

### ZOOFARI

In its fourteenth year, ZooFari is a local favorite of charity mavens and food connoisseurs alike. More than 60 Valley restaurants compete to woo attendees with creatively designed booths and tempting tastes.

Dress at Zoofari is formal and creative at once. Guests in black tie and leopard prints roam zoo grounds lit by stars and twinkling lights. The incongruity of dazzling dress in a typically casual setting adds to the fun. Roaming entertainers, world musicians and wakeful animals, likely annoyed by all this nighttime revelry, keep the atmosphere festive.

The real attraction, though, is the food, from barbecue to blinis, seafood to satay. The minimal exercise of hiking from one taste to the next is probably key to party survival.

Funds from raffle tickets and event tickets fund a variety of Phoenix Zoo educational programs and events. This year's Zoofari will be held on Friday, October 11, from 6:30 to 11:30 p.m. Call 602-914-4390 for tickets.

### GRANDDADDY AT THE GALLERIA

Scottsdale Hops Vine and Dine has been benefiting the Scottsdale Boys and Girls Clubs for 27 years, making it the granddaddy of culinary events. This year's extravaganza will feature wine, appetizers, and desserts from AJ's and will be held at the Galleria Corporate Centre in downtown Scottsdale.

Scottsdale Hops Vine and Dine will be held from 6 pm to 9 pm on Saturday, October 19. Gold tickets holders will move on to a post-event party that runs until midnight. Tickets are available at (480)860-5520.