

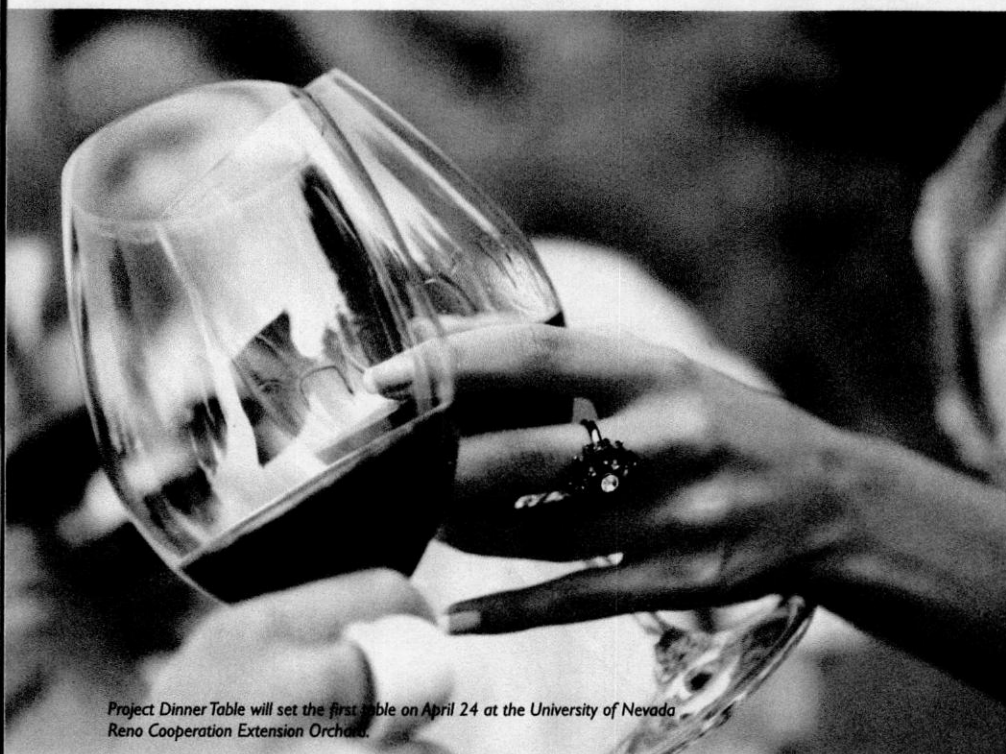
Food for Thought

Building Community One Dinner at a Time

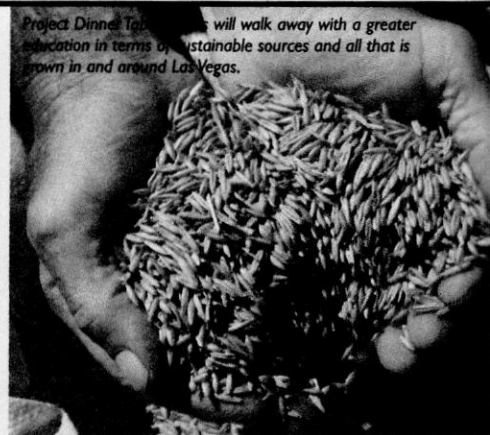
BY KRISSEY HAWKINS

Building community one dinner at a time – this is the mission of Project Dinner Table, an innovative series of farm-to-table dinners that will be marking its debut meal on April 24th. The brainchild of local professionals, who have since been dubbed “The Kitchen Cabinet,” the dinner series was created to showcase local growers and suppliers combined with stimulating conversation and philanthropy.

“The combination of unique dinners on location, the celebration of food in a simple and experiential way, and the chance to connect with new people whom we are sharing our meal with will be an unforgettable experience,” says Gina Gavan, founder of Project Dinner Table.



Project Dinner Table will set the first table on April 24 at the University of Nevada Reno Cooperation Extension Orchard.



Gina Gavan, founder of Project Dinner Table



The community experience is at the heart of Project Dinner Table. Guests break bread with local growers, food artisans, restaurateurs and other spirited community members. Between the incredible cuisine and enlightening conversation guests will also walk away with a greater education in terms of sustainable sources and all that is grown in and around Las Vegas, literally learning about what is available in their own back yard.

"We reserve the right to surprise and entertain you in special ways, so expect an unforgettable experience," reports Gavan of Project Dinner Table. "The menu is meant to be part of the journey and is inspired by the season, local ingredients, the setting and the chef. Guests will first discover the menu at their place setting when they sit down that evening."

Blending appreciation for the farm-to-table movement with philanthropic passion, the organization will select a local charity to be honored at each dinner and a donation will be presented to the charity on behalf of the guests, the chef and sponsors. In the spirit of giving back, the organization is also dedicated to planting trees in the community throughout the year as a "thank you" for supporting the project. The core and focus of each event is truly the community dinner experience, but "the donation to charity and encouraging volunteerism is a part of how we will build community," says Gavan.

The inaugural Project Dinner Table series will be comprised of seven dinners throughout the course of the year. Venues discussed for upcoming dinners include Springs Preserve, the Historic Fifth Street School, Red Rock, Gilcrease Orchard, Mt. Charleston and other adventurous locations.

Each dinner will feature one local chef who will prepare the meal in an alfresco kitchen using ingredients from local growers, all served in a unique setting. The number of dinner guests will vary from 125 to 150, depending upon location, but each dinner will find guests seated at one long table – family-style.

The first table will be set at the University of Nevada Reno Cooperation Extension Orchard, located in North Las Vegas, with Royden Ellamar, Chef de Cuisine at Sensi Restaurant at Bellagio, preparing a season-inspired dinner.

"My food philosophy is to keep things simple by utilizing the freshest product with minimal manipulation and evoking personal memories through food," says Ellamar.

Chef Ellamar previously served as Chef de Cuisine at the Seasons hotels in Hawaii and Chicago as well as The Beverly Hills Hotel in California. He initially moved to Las Vegas in 2006 to work at L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon and has been at Sensi since 2008.

Since Ellamar took over as Chef de Cuisine, Sensi's menu has become more product driven. "We utilize local growers and producers and question all of our food sources for the sake and safety of our guests," says Ellamar. "Sensi is committed to serving sustainably produced meats, fish and locally grown produce. We buy organic as much as we can and are building relationships with local farmers every week at the Las Vegas Farmers' Market."

Prior to dinner being served, guests will enjoy an opening reception introduction of the local host, purveyors, partners and sponsors, as well as a guided tour of the host location.

The founding group of organizers includes a plethora of professionals, from community activists to purveyors to marketing professionals to web designers -- a diverse committee who have literally rolled up their sleeves to get Project Dinner Table off the ground.

"This project is truly a collaborative and community initiative on multiple levels," concludes Gavan. "We unite to educate people on the importance of buying locally and to honor the celebration of gathering around the table."

Project Dinner Table is open to the public with ticket prices beginning at \$150 for a six-course meal. Following the April 24th debut, the dinner will be held at Sculpture Park in the Downtown Arts District on May 22nd with Chef Joe Koniski, Executive Chef for the Monte Carlo Hotel & Casino, the event will also include an on-site brew. Tickets are available at projectdinnertable.com. □