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'Top Chef Masters' Chef Saran Says Dine Out Thursday

Participating restaurants will donate 25 percent of food sales to The Health Trust for AIDS patients and awareness.

By [Anne Ernst](#) | [Email the author](#) | April 26, 2011



All it took was a simple email, and Suvir Saran was ready to throw his superstar chef status behind the cause of Thursday's [Dining Out for Life](#), a fundraising effort that also helps bring awareness to HIV/AIDS.

"I don't want people to dine out much, but when they do, they should dine out for a cause," Saran says.

Dining out should be an event, an enjoyable one, and why not couple that with helping to raise money for a good cause, he says.

And it's this cause—[Dining Out for Life](#)—that Saran hopes will get people talking about the disease he says has crippled the world.

"We all know someone who has died from AIDS. Nobody has been left innocent," he says.

The annual event is part of a national campaign to call attention to the fight against HIV/AIDS, and more than 40 Bay Area restaurants will donate at least 25 percent of food sales on Thursday to [The Health Trust](#) AIDS Services, which supports about 800 people with AIDS in Santa Clara County by providing food and other services.

Among the participating restaurants in Cupertino are [Park Place](#) and [Cupertino Bakery](#), plus several [Amici's East Coast Pizzeria](#) locations in Cupertino, Menlo Park and Mountain View. A full list of restaurants can be found on The Health Trust's [website](#), but there won't be any mention of Saran's surprise visits—one of which may be in Cupertino.

Campbell-headquartered [The Health Trust](#) has a food warehouse—The Health Trust Food Basket—in San Jose, which provides nutritious food to about 400 clients who go to the center and an additional 50 who are completely homebound, according to Vandana Pant, development director. Saran will hold a talk and healthy-cooking demonstration there, joined by San Francisco chef, cookbook author and early HIV/AIDS activist Joyce Goldstein.

The conversation around eating food for health and the relevance of changing diets to have a positive health impact on AIDS patients is really just the tip of the iceberg, Pant says.

"Food is a great opportunity around which to have difficult conversations," she says. "Food is a central nexus that allows people to cross all kinds of barriers."

New Delhi-born Saran, who is now competing in Bravo TV's *Top Chef Masters*, is the executive chef of [Devi](#) restaurant in New York City, the only Indian restaurant in America with a Michelin star. He is the author of two cookbooks. He is also gay.

A self-described "shock jock" and "irreverent" spokesman for HIV/AIDS awareness, Saran seems the perfect fit for these events. He says things to get people thinking, and talking.

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As people live longer with AIDS, it is now a more chronic illness, Pant says, but there is still a "huge sense of stigma" surrounding the topic.

Because of his celebrity status, Saran says he believes he can say things publicly about HIV/AIDS that others cannot, for fear of being politically incorrect, or of being punished in some way for their words.

"A lot of people have to worry about what they say. They worry that if they are honest they may lose their job."

As his own boss, Saran doesn't face that concern.

So he speaks out as often as he can about the need to get a vaccine and to promote healthy and nutritious cooking—at home, he stresses. And he hopes Dining Out for Life and the other events associated with it—such as a Q&A with [Carolyn Jung](#), a James Beard Award-winning food writer, on Friday at the [Indian Community Center](#) in Milpitas—will get people thinking, talking and acting.

"Why is it in this day and age, we still haven't discovered a vaccine for HIV/AIDS?" he asks. "I hope at least two or three people will get angry and join the bandwagon that's demanding a change now."

Dining Out for Life **raised \$48,000 last year** for The Health Trust organization, and its organizers hope Saran's celebrity status will draw more attention.

Peter Cooperstein, owner of Amici's, said his restaurants have participated in the event for several years, donating some \$13,000 from 11 locations last year, about half of which was donated to The Health Trust and the other portion to the Stop AIDS Project from their San Francisco and East Bay locations.

"It's really such a Bay Area event," Cooperstein says. "We do other events and get involved in a lot of other causes; there aren't any unimportant causes. But this event strikes a bigger chord in the community than some of the others."

Comments (2)



Laura Dudnick

9:42pm on Tuesday, April 26, 2011

This is awesome! What a great article, Anne!!



Anne Ernst

12:13pm on Wednesday, April 27, 2011

Thanks Laura! Do you have any participating restaurants near you?