

# CREATING EFFECTIVE DONOR DINNERS

*Tips from former Chief Advancement Officer, Connie Kravas. Presented by Melissa Englund (Director, UMAC).*

## How to get the right people in the room

- Connie likes to work with 3 volunteers who brainstorm together about who cares about the cause, then do their own outreach to attendees to let them know an invitation is coming, and that the event is not a fundraiser.

## When to host a dinner

- Anytime there's a new dean or chair, or something to celebrate.
- Milestone donors (measured by years of giving rather than dollar amount.) Connie says you can count on errors for any gifts older than 40 years.
- HSS, recognition level donors, etc.

## How to make sure people show up

- Involving guests in the process makes them insiders, and they show up. I.e. – ask someone to make a toast, or pose a question to the group, etc.
- A reminder goes out before the event that includes directions, attire (casual, but purple is always welcome), as well as a list of who is coming – which means people will notice if they then don't show up.

## Logistics

- Connie like to have drinks ready when they arrive, and to personally pass hors d'oeuvres so that she knows she speaks with everyone in the room.
- Plan for 45-60 minutes for a cocktail hour before dinner. Finish the cocktail hour with a welcome from Connie, and then someone gives a toast to why they're all here.
- Usually keep the group to 18-24 people. It's small enough that everyone can participate in the same larger conversation, even if they're split between 2 tables. (Which normally happens at Connie's house.)
- Connie asks the chef to come out and introduce each course as it's served to make it that much more special. She puts a focus on serving really great food.
- Connie takes a group photo with everyone before they leave, and sends it out the next morning with an authentic message of thanks to all of the attendees.

## Conversations & messaging

- The leading question at the start of dinner really sets the tone. Usually posed by the host or a volunteer (have up to 3 backup questions, just in case.)
- If there's a presentation, do it during the cocktail hour so that sitting down to dinner means a conversation everyone can participate in.
- Think ahead about messaging you want to communicate during the event, and strategically decide how and when you want to communicate those messages. (And through whom.) Communicate that strategy to faculty attending dinners so that they're armed with their talking points and know what to do.

## Follow-up

- Connie makes sure to set aside time the morning after (not 3 days or a week later) to follow up with an email and the group photo. She's noticed that this helps create connections and community between guests, and has led to long-term friendships between guests in the past.