

Gathering for Goodness

By Pat Kaczmarek

Most of us enjoy throwing an occasional dinner party for friends and relatives, but how often are they attended by top medical researchers, noted university professors or the director of the Multnomah County Health Department? Imagine the lively discussions on social topics that these guests inspire.

A Gathering of Good (agog) is sponsored by Metropolitan Family Service to provide a forum for provocative, thoughtful, action-igniting discussions on important social issues in our community. Fun and informative, these “agog dinners & discussions” are planned as a yearly series. This year, the focus is on building healthy communities. Community members arrange gatherings, with support from the agency. Meals have been catered, home-cooked, potluck, or summer barbeque, setting the scene for a lively exchange of ideas. At each dinner, local conversation leaders who are experts in relevant topics moderate and engage guests in conversation.

To date, nearly 200 people have participated in the 2010 discussion series. Topics have included identifying and reducing root causes of healthcare disparities, keeping our brains active and healthy, designing our neighborhoods for health, and helping parents and families create strong foundations. At one dinner, three innovative leaders from the Oregon Health & Science University led the conversation. Guests considered whether popular culture in the United States could support the level of personal responsibility and social changes that is needed to improve our overall health. Acknowledging that personal behavior plays a major role in healthcare outcomes, guests came up with many possible recommendations, including taking an active role in their healthcare and making healthier lifestyle choices. Thinking personally, systemically and outside the box is encouraged.

A Gathering of Good, the culmination of the series and a benefit for Metropolitan Family Service, is scheduled for Saturday, October 16, at the Portland Hilton Grand Ballroom. At this event, Metropolitan Family Service will be recognizing local community leaders who are “doing good”—people who are passionate and focused on building a healthy community and inspiring others to learn, share and get more involved.

The second annual Provocateur award will be presented to Eileen Brady, the cofounder of New Seasons Market. Ms. Brady serves on the Oregon Health Policy Board and Oregon Business Association Board and speaks regularly on sustainability, building regional food systems, and transforming healthcare. The Provocateur award was created in memory of Eileen Johnson, who was an inspiring example of community activism and dedicated to the mission of Metropolitan Family Service.

Dr. Larry Wallack, Dean of the College of Urban & Public Affairs at Portland State University, is the featured keynote speaker. He is known for his work in media advocacy, an innovative approach to working with mass media and communities to advance social and public health issues.

For 60 years, Metropolitan Family Service has been building healthy communities to support children, families and older adults. Programs include parenting education, school programs in high-poverty neighborhoods, inter-generational mentoring for elementary students, transportation services for older adults, and a vibrant volunteer

corps. Annually, Metropolitan Family Service helps more than 37,000 people facing economic and cultural barriers that include health problems, poverty, inadequate education and isolation.



A dinner hosted by Portland resident Dave Johnson included conversation leaders from OHSU. From left, Tana Grady-Weliky, M.D.; Dave Johnson; Brian Druker, M.D.; John “Jay” Nutt, M.D.; and Metropolitan Family Service executive director Krista Larson.



Conversation leader, Dr. Michael Mega (left), medical director of the Cognitive Assessment Clinic at the Providence Brain Institute, talks with a guest at a recent agog dinner & discussion.

A Gathering of Good proceeds support Metropolitan Family Service programs. Last year’s event sold out and raised over \$260,000.

Visit agatheringofgood.org.

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