

Suburban Life

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Entertaining People

Murder mystery dinner theater is labor of love for producer

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

MURDER MYSTERY Dinner Theatre is offered every Thursday night in Bobby's Country House, in Livonia.

It's a something new for Alexandra and Bob Sakellaris, Farmington Hills residents who operate the full-service banquet facilities at 35780 Five Mile Road.

It's a labor of love for Steve Katz, a Livonia resident who quit his job as a sales representative to turn full-time actor, producer and writer for the fledgling company called Entertaining People.

Of the company owned by Katz and his co-producer Kathleen Lietz of Redford, Katz says, "So far so good."

"Kathy and I are both board members for the Plymouth Theatre Guild so we know a lot of actors and see a lot of them audition. We've hand-picked the actors and actresses we use in our scripts and have excellent casts that all work well together."

Katz continued by saying that being an award winning actor is not necessarily the quality he needs for a murder mystery dinner theater.

"The key here is interaction with the audience, which is an intrinsic part of all of our scripts. The actor or actress must be able to respond or ad lib under any conceivable set of circumstances because so many times those circumstances change with a different audience."

ENTERTAINING people has produced five scripts for a large variety

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— Steve Katz

of audiences, each that have been appreciated, Katz said. Four of the shows have been produced for dinner audiences. The other, called 'Stanley and Sara,' was written to entertain buses full of tourists who are on long trips.

Stanley and Sara are newlyweds whose car breaks down on the road. They hail down the bus and ask for help. The minute the couple are aboard the bus, the show begins.

"It sometimes takes a while for the riders to catch on to what is going on, but when they do, they keep interacting with us all the way," Katz said.

The dinner theater format begins with the actors and actresses greeting the guests as they arrive for the show. They introduce themselves personally and chat, then mingle or table hop to say hello to other guests.

When dinner is ready to be served, the cast is seated at a prominent table. The cast talks among themselves and to those around them. Sometimes one or two of the cast will have a conversation all can hear on the way to the bar, for example, or use whatever ruse possible to give out clues. The murder may have already taken place, or it will take place during dinner.

Many times, during the early part of the evening, a guest will be asked if he or she will cooperate by pre-

tending to be a given character.

"It's easy. It's fun. Nobody is put on the spot. Nobody is ever intimidated. We keep it light and funny and entertaining," Katz said.

BOTH ALEXANDRA and Bobby Sakellaris come from families that have a long history in the restaurant business. They have been operating Bobby's Country House for about seven years, and closed down the restaurant in the facility when the banquet part of the business began taking up the bulk of their time.

"Don't tell me people aren't getting married anymore. And beyond that, they are having more and more traditional weddings, more formal weddings, and they are keeping both floors filled here," Alexandra Sakellaris said.

She said the most popular requests for the rooms were for wedding receptions, then wedding and engagement showers, golf and bowling banquets and retirement parties.

"We're always filled up Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, so the Murder Mystery Dinner Theatre had to be on Thursdays. It's good food and good entertainment for \$25," she said. "We've enjoyed the Thursday nights so much I am doing what I can to get some of the people who have booked our rooms interested in hiring Entertaining People for their entertainment."

"I have a feeling this is going to be some kind of a trend. I think this is going to be the new thing for private parties," she said.

"We tailor our scripts to any kind of special-interest group audience, from a Sweet 16 Party to a 50th Anniversary," Katz said. "We are continually working on new scripts and coming up with new ideas."

KATZ JOKES that he thinks he must have hit his mid-life crisis when he gave up his job to give Entertaining People all of his time and energies.

"Murder mystery companies have come and gone, many of them were evening jobs and the people running them just ran out of steam," he said. "For myself, the time came when I just had to make a decision. I believe in this, so I had to try -- to give it my all."

Katz and Lietz have both worked as actors on and off since high school days.

Katz graduated with a degree in philosophy from the University of Toledo. Knowing about Socrates didn't help him much in the way of marketing Entertaining People, so he says, "The way has sometimes been rocky, but I always liked people. I was always a ham. It all fell together. I like what I'm doing."

The murder mystery changes every month in Bobby's Country House. For reservations call 464-5555.

Staff photos
by
Sharon LeMieux



Pam Richards, a dinner guest from Waterford, gets into the act when offered a bribe by Steve Katz. In the play called "Council for Murder."

Katz takes the role of a crooked politician with his heart set on being the mayor.

She sings, she dances, she tells funny jokes and she delivers singing telegrams in "Council for Murder." She's actress Jennifer Johnson of Northville.



Ron Brahmmer of Westland has his dinner interrupted to take a part in the play with actress Linda Bastien. The Northville actress takes the role of Judge Mary Dunbar, widow of the late Mayor William Dunbar.



Steve Katz, playing the role of the crooked politician, tries bribing everyone, even Bobby's Country House waitress, Lois Corps.



Bobby and Alexandra Sakellaris both grew up with families in the restaurant business, so they can assure their guests good food. The added touch is Entertaining People, a company that acts out a murder mystery during dinner and gets the audience to take part in the fun. The Sakellaris' are Farmington Hills residents.