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David Bouley, Charlie Trotter to Cook for Disabled Kids

By Patrick Cole on May 31, 2012



When Wine Spectator magazine called Charlie Trotter's the world's best restaurant for food and wine service in 1998, it didn't just certify the chef behind the Chicago eatery.

It also helped reveal the quiet philanthropy that Charlie Trotter had been pursuing, such as cooking in people's homes for charity.

"You don't set out doing things like that," said Trotter, who received the James Beard Foundation's Humanitarian of the Year award earlier this month. "You do it because you want to make a difference."

Trotter's philanthropy has ranged from feeding the poor in the restaurant's neighborhood to making dishes for fundraisers hosted by nonprofits such as the Make-a-Wish Foundation and Meals on Wheels Chicago. His Charlie Trotter Culinary Education Foundation has raised more than \$3 million for students seeking culinary careers.

After a 25-year run, Trotter will close his restaurant on Aug. 31 to take a break from the food business. He will enter the University of Chicago this autumn to study philosophy.

Before that, however, he will help his longtime friend David Bouley stage a charity dinner Monday night at the Bouley Test Kitchen in Manhattan.

The two master chefs have developed a culinary kinship over the years. Bouley started his eponymous Manhattan restaurant in 1987, the year Charlie Trotter's opened its doors. They have shared techniques and have cooked and eaten in each other's restaurant kitchens.

Disabled Children

The \$400-a-person event for about 60 diners will aid New Alternatives for Children, a New York nonprofit that helps families care for their disabled or chronically ill children. Bouley's wife, the artist, photographer and Tribeca Film Festival founder Nicole Bartelme, is a supporter of the organization.

"We thought this would be a great event to complement all the efforts he's made through charity and to engage

his New York clientele," Bouley said in a phone interview. "This is an industry of sharing, spirit and celebration, and we wanted to celebrate the time he's taking."

About 60 percent of Trotter's patrons live outside the Chicago area. Ray Harris, a New York-based investment banker who has eaten more than 400 times at his restaurant, is expected to attend Monday's fundraiser, Trotter said.

Bouley said they will figure out the menu after seeing what's on offer from the farmers and fishermen who supply his restaurant.

'Blooming Right Now'

"We're definitely looking at products that are blooming right now, and we'll wait for Mother Nature to tell us what's available," Bouley said. "We're going to create a lot of things that Charlie likes."

Trotter said he will bring eight chefs with him to the test kitchen. His sommeliers will also join him, including Larry Stone, the only U.S.-born sommelier to have earned the title of French master sommelier from the Union de la Sommellerie Francaise.

(The fundraiser for New Alternatives hosted by Trotter and Bouley is Monday at 6:30 p.m. at the Bouley Test Kitchen, 88 West Broadway (at Chambers Street) in Manhattan. Tickets are \$400. Information: <http://www.davidbouley.com> or +1-212-964-2525).