

DesMoinesRegister.com

Christopher's aims to take benefit personally

By TOM PERRY • tperry@dmreg.com • April 12, 2010

Rene Giudicessi of Christopher's restaurant has donated to dozens of benefits, fundraisers and worthy causes over the years.

But it will be more than an act of charity for her when she sends Christopher's chef Arturo Mora to the American Cancer Society's Chefs in Stride small-plate event Friday at Gateway Market in the Village of Ponderosa, West Des Moines.

"This is personal for me," Giudicessi said this week at her family's Beavertdale restaurant.

Her sister, Syndi Giudicessi Johnson, died of breast cancer in May of 1999, at the age of 50, she explained. Today, a charcoal portrait of Syndi hangs on the wall across from the reception desk at Christopher's.

Rene has kept memories of her sister close by, but she said this is the first time that she and Christopher's have been involved to this extent in a fundraiser for breast cancer.

"Shame on us for taking this long," Giudicessi said. "But I think my sister would be very proud of us even though it took us a while."

Christopher's will be joined at the event by nine other eateries - the Des Moines Embassy Club, Flarah's, Fleming's Prime Steakhouse, Gateway Market, Glorious Desserts, Grand Piano Bistro, Mojo's on 86th, Sam & Gabe's and Waterfront Seafood Market.

Giudicessi is excited that chef Mora is planning to

prepare small plates of scallops and shrimp for the event. She wants the Christopher's station to be one of the more memorable at the event, she said.

Chefs in Stride has another personal tie to Giudicessi's sister. Marilyn Cedarstrom, co-chair of Chefs in Stride, had been a friend of Syndi's going back to the 1960s and their days at Roosevelt High School.


"There were about 12 of us who were really very close," Cedarstrom said, referring to a group of women who have stayed in touch over the years. "Syndi's loss was very difficult for us all."

Since their friend's death, several of the women, including Cedarstrom, have been diagnosed with cancer.

"I was one of the lucky ones," she said. "My cancer was contained."

Besides food, the Chefs in Stride event will include drinks, raffles, silent auctions and music by jazz musician Max Wellman. All the proceeds will be dedicated to cancer research.

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