

Party like the stars on Oscar night

by Ryan A. Sinclair

Next Sunday, millions of film fans around the globe will gather to witness the televised pomp and ceremony of the 72nd annual Academy Awards. Movie fans can't get enough of the stars, the stars can't get enough of themselves, and the whole world seems to stop for a glimpse of this popular parade of glamour and glitz. Although the ceremony is the main draw, it isn't the only reason the stars come out for the event.

Sally Van Slyke, a long-time Academy member and local catering guru, believes the best aspect of the Oscars is the array of parties surrounding the occasion.

"It's really a bit of a drag to go to the Awards themselves," says Van Slyke, owner of Lafayette-based Wild Thyme Catering. "You have to be dressed by noon, make it down to the pavilion, do the red carpet thing and be in your seat by 5pm—no exceptions." Van Slyke recalls one year when the infamous L.A. rush-hour traffic was particularly nasty: getting to one's seat meant ditching the ride part-way down the promenade. The problem: the venue.

"It was the one time they decided to hold it in the sports arena at UCLA," she says. "Half of us had to get out of our limos and run the rest of the way. I was

behind a very pregnant Glenn Close, who was running at a full clip. If she hadn't been in such good shape, she may not have made it to her seat on time."

As one-time marketing director for Universal Pictures, Van Slyke has been privy to many an Oscar night, and still votes on the nominees each year. She has also been fortunate enough to attend the many A-list parties, which have become quite over-the-top during the last few years.

"The ultimate party, always given by Irving 'Swifty' Lazar, was thrown at Spago's every year." After Swifty's death in 1995, the Vanity Fair party emerged as the most trendy and most sought after. You can get a lot of Hollywood's A-list to show up, according to Van Slyke, because the Vanity Fair magazine cover is the holy grail for most actors. The actors go in hopes of increasing their chances of landing on the cover.

However, not every celeb who is invited is welcome. Rumor has it that Monica Lewinsky was invited last year, yet no one wanted to talk to her. At least she got in.

Many "B" list actors (or bit-part and some television folk) just don't make the cut—unless of course, they become "A" the following year. Yes, Tinseltown is fickle, fickle and ficklest. But



Sally Van Slyke, a Lafayette caterer and a voting member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, displays party food, her Oscar ballot and movie memorabilia. She says the parties are the best part of the Academy Awards.

getting in once, says Van Slyke, is a memorable experience.

She has thrown her share of Oscar parties and says it isn't that difficult to throw your own. With her advice, a little imagination and proper planning, the ultimate Academy Awards party can be yours.

SALLY'S ULTIMATE OSCAR PARTY

Ambiance: The event should be black tie, and the ceremony should be aired on big screen TVs, live via satellite. Limos should be provided to pick up your guests, and camera crews should be hired to film the guests as they arrive. Rent a red carpet and a gold Oscar statue to sit at the end of the long walk. Ropes and stanchions should corral the folks as they arrive.

Select five men and women to represent each of the Oscar nominees in the "best" categories. Get someone to interview the guests on video and hire some kids to scream and yell, like real fans. This can be played right back, and you will have your own pre-Oscar show playing throughout the night.

Food and beverage: Lots of free-flowing bubbly is mandatory, and Bellini's (peach nectar with champagne) are a must. And don't forget the martinis! Hors d'oeuvres like sushi, carpaccio, shrimp kebabs, a veggie dish and Beef Wellington are perfect. On the finely decorated buffet table, complete with statuettes and photos of the stars, offer a wide array of cheeses, fruits, fondues and paté. And don't forget the Veal Oscar!

An hour into the awards ceremony, seat everyone: or better yet, offer an upscale buffet.

Name every dish after a nominated film. "American Beauty" could be represented by a prime rib decorated with red roses. For "The Cider House Rules"? Pot roast tenderloin garnished with baked apples. Sally came up with chocolate "Insider" soufflé cake and "Green Mile" salad for a Lafayette client's party.

This is the perfect event for a fund raiser, especially in this area. If you are going to do it, do it right. Give all the guests an official Academy ballot and let everyone vote. The invitation could say "And the winner is..." Dress the servers as old movie stars, have a cigarette girl and a coat-check area. Make it a '40s theme.

"The possibilities are endless," says Van Slyke, "It just takes planning, creativity and a love of film."

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Celebrate Oscar night and support Arc-Solano

If you are interested in playing movie star for an evening, try the fourth annual Oscar party and fund-raising event to benefit The Arc-Solano, Sunday March 26 at St. Patrick-St. Vincent High School in Vallejo. The Arc Solano is a local chapter of a national organization dedicated to training and supporting mentally retarded individuals. The event starts at 5:30pm and costume or black tie is recommended. Price includes no-host bar, buffet dinner, silent auction and Oscar viewing on big screen TVs. Balloting for prizes and a costume contest are planned. Tickets are \$30 each. Last year tickets sold out quickly, so get yours early. For more information call 707-552-2935.

SALLY'S PICKS

The right hairstyle, gown and party vendors will make you and your guests feel like movie stars at your Oscar party. Consider the following businesses, recommended by Sally Van Slyke, for a touch of Hollywood glamour on Oscar night:

WILD THYME CATERING/EVENT MANAGEMENT—2770 Camino Diablo, Lafayette, 925-945-7939.

BEVERAGES AND MORE—2900 N. Main St., Walnut Creek, 925-472-0130.

C & M PARTY—1942 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Walnut Creek, 925-934-3181.

TRAVELIN' JOE ESPRESSO—510-843-8730

GOLDEN GATE VALET—1601 Main St., Walnut Creek, 925-210-1232.

DIPLOMAT LIMOUSINE—3227 Clayton Road, Concord, 925-691-1500.

EAST BAY FLOWER COMPANY—206 Sycamore Valley Road West, Danville, 925-837-3418.

THE PARTY DISC JOCKEYS—1480 Creekside Drive, Walnut Creek, 925-280-9028. Web site: www.thepartydjs.com.

LADANE PRINTING—1300 Galaxy Way, Concord, 925-676-7764.

THE BALLOON MAN—1942 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Walnut Creek, 925-934-3186.

NOUVELLE IMAGE VIDEO PRODUCTION—1372 N. Main St., Suite 200, Walnut Creek, 925-938-3836.

CUSTOM PHOTOGRAPHY—2395 Pleasant Hill Road, Pleasant Hill, 925-988-0209.

IN-TOWN FORMAL WEAR—5100 Clayton Road, Concord, 925-671-7160.

CHANGES SALON AND DAY SPA—1475 Broadway, Walnut Creek 925-947-1814.

SPECIAL EVENT HAIR DESIGN—By Connie Jamieson, 2232 Oak Grove Road, Walnut Creek, 925-945-6667.

VERN JIMINEZ JEWELERS—1383 N. Broadway, Walnut Creek, 925-933-6999.