

right
 ANDREA SMALEC holding an
 Emile Henry pie plate from EGGSHELLS
 photography JASON MASTERS

house MADE

Smalec gets cooking for Our House

by Jason Wiest

It is shortly after 5 p.m. on a weekday weeks ago, and Andrea Smalec is in Copper Grill having a drink with a woman. Could have been a colleague, a friend, perhaps even a stranger; Smalec's got a personality people gravitate toward, and the comfort of her pull creates the perfect climate for a pitch, something the PR professional has surely long known. We became acquaintances when I was a newspaper reporter, and as I pass, she smiles, greets me, and quickly insists that I come to Dinner on the Grounds, the annual Our House fundraiser she's chairing in June.

Our House, a shelter for the working homeless, happens to be the year's main charity for Mitchell Williams, the law firm Smalec works for as director of marketing and public relations and manager of its charitable program. Truly well-connected though, Smalec had also learned of Our House through the charity's executive director, Georgia Mjartan, who appeared on Soirée's December 2008 cover, and LRTweetUp, a civic group on Twitter that supports charities. Our House operates an 80-bed shelter, two "family houses" that provide transitional housing for 13 homeless households, an education and job training center, a free childcare center, after-school

and summer youth development programs and a feeding program that serves 77,000 meals annually. Its other free services include parenting classes, addiction recovery groups, counseling and job search assistance. "The fact that they are a nonprofit organization built on the true heart of volunteerism" – the executive director is the only full-time staffer – "really said something to me about the conviction they have to truly make a difference in the lives of those in our

community," Smalec said.

Compelled, she didn't hesitate when asked to chair the fifth Dinner on the Grounds, a casual, outdoor Southern supper event featuring nouveau cuisine from some of the state's best restaurants and caterers, libations and live jazz entertainment by Lagniappe in the gardens of the Arkansas Governor's Mansion. Fish and fowl are on the menu this year, as is a signature cocktail—designed by Chef Donnie Ferneau—to be unveiled at the event. And although she's not the Betty Crocker-type she wishes she were, Smalec will live vicariously through a new Southern celebrity pie silent auction – with autographed recipe cards – she added to the event.

She beams talking about it, and her excitement's contagious. As you settle into conversation with her, you might ask, "Why June?" and then comes the pitch. "In the summer, very low-income parents who are working while their young children are in school ... can't afford childcare, and if they stay home with their young ones, they will lose the job that pays their rent. This situation, which many low-income families find themselves in, results in dozens of families with children becoming homeless and coming to Our House each summer."

Compelling stuff, indeed. ©

Dinner on the Grounds

when/ 6–9 p.m., Friday, June 4
where/ Arkansas Governor's Mansion
tickets/ \$65 per person, which provides one week of food, shelter and counseling to a working homeless individual.
info/ 374-7383, Ext. 200,
 ganelle@ourhouseshelter.org, Ourhouseshelter.org

PLATE **SÉ: Do you like to cook? What's your favorite thing to cook?** AS: Yes, I am the master at the 5-ingredient recipe! My favorite would have to be my spinach, tomato and feta bowtie pasta with grilled chicken. I also make a yummy apricot-glazed pork chop.

SÉ: What is your favorite restaurant in Little Rock, and what do you order there?

AS: Mary Beth Ringgold's fabulous Copper Grill. My pick: the pistachio-encrusted tilapia entrée paired with a glass of Maison Louis Jadot Chardonnay.

SÉ: You're a Chicago native – what are some of your favorite eateries there?

AS: A few of the faves I frequent: Coco Pazzo, Tuscan Italian dining; Gene & Georgetti; a steak and chop house; Giordano's, a Chicago-style deep dish pie; Tarantino's, a cozy, neighborhood restaurant; and Vines on Clark, a sports grille located directly across from Wrigley Field.



SWEET POTATO PIE & CHOCOLATE-PECAN PIE
Two of the pies donated to the auction by Chris Monroe of HUNKA PIE.

your own slice of fame
 celebrity pie participants

- * First Lady Ginger Beebe
- * Sen. Blanche Lincoln
- * Kris Allen's mother, Kim Allen
- * Heather and DC (Alice 107.7)
- * Bob Steel (KARN)

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dedicated
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