

**NEED
ADVICE?
WE'VE GOT IT!**

REGISTER | HEADLINES

NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN CONNECTION

WWW.NYDAILYNEWS.COM

DAILY NEWS

Search for



Current



**DAILY
DISH**



CLASSIFIEDS | HELP

[Home](#) [News & Views](#) [Sports](#) [Entertainment](#) [Business](#) [Boroughs](#) [City Life](#) [Services](#)

The perfect hosts

PS 163 students learn the art of throwing a dinner party

By JOE DZIEMIANOWICZ

The sangria was cranberry juice with diced apples. The gleaming silverware, tucked into neatly folded napkins, was plastic. The soiree ended at 8:30 p.m. to accommodate event planners' bedtimes.

As elegant dinner parties go, it wasn't the typical upper West Side story.

"Welcome to our graduation fiesta," said exuberant fifth-graders who'd asked parents and some special guests to dine with them last week. "Would you join us for guacamole?"

The 10- and 11-year-olds are in a dual-language class of gifted and talented students, so they greeted guests in English and in Spanish.

"Thank you" and "Gracias" replied moms and dads, many of whom arrived with desserts - flan, cheesecake, chocolate ancho-chili cake and brie with brown sugar.

The Spanish-themed feast held June 3 at Public School 163 on W. 97th St. was the latest big event in the Dinner Party Project, a five-week program that teaches kids about throwing a dinner get-together - from balancing the menu and food safety to writing invitations and dining etiquette.

As parents hugged their knees at low-lying cafeteria tables, they said it was fun attending an event where kids called the shots.

The dining hall, like the students, was decked out in its festive best. There were red balloons, pink and green piñatas and purple and red tablecloths. Sombreros hung on walls, as a deejay spun tunes and used a fog machine ("Sooooo cool," said one girl) every so often to produce a magical mist.

"Everything looks great," said Christia Mercer, who teaches at Columbia. "I'm impressed." She and partner Stephen Grover had been invited by their son Josiah.

Trina DiNapoli, a legal marketer whose triplet daughters were among the 20 student hosts, delighted at the scene and the menu. The meal included guacamole - which the kids helped make - along with salad, beef fajitas,



Rosier NEWS

The students learn how to make vinaigrette with help from chef Feliberto Estevez.



Rosier NEWS

The young hosts are poised to serve the salad course.



Rosier NEWS

Andrew Del Rosario puts the finishing touches on his dinner outfit.



**WE BRING
NEW YORK -
AND THE
WORLD -
TO YOUR DOOR**

SPECIAL OFFER
Click here!

grilled chicken and yucca.

Students crafted the party with their teacher and with Gracie Mansion executive chef Feliberto Estevez and other food pros, who volunteered their time.

Ingredients were donated by Fresh Direct.

"Food is a great tool to bring people together," said Mercer.

The brains behind the Dinner Party Project - Spoons Across America, a children's culinary educational organization - knew that when the program launched in 2001. Since then, 45 dinner parties have been held across the U.S. Upcoming dinner parties are planned for PS 282 in Park Slope, with chef Elizabeth Schaible, and the Child School on Roosevelt Island, with chef Bill Yosses.

"The Dinner Party Project is about using mealtimes to help families connect," said Julia V. Jordan, who founded Spoons Across America and teaches hospitality management at New York City College of Technology. "It changes the way families think about their lives. When children can participate in a project and show others what they know, it's proof that they're learning."

Ask Andrew Del Rosario. After he and his classmates were taught how to fold napkins, he surprised his folks by doing that at home.

"The table looked so fancy," said his dad. "I thought that my wife had done it."

Beyond acquiring new skills, children like Rachel Mandelbaum expanded their interest in food. "Before this, Rachel would only eat a scrambled egg for dinner," said her mom. "Now she eats salad. It's amazing."

Late in the evening, triplet mom DiNapoli was a little astonished that her daughters didn't disapprove when she merengued with one of their classmates. "I love to dance," she said, "and my girls are always like, 'Mom, *please* don't dance.'"

Last week, however, the girls let their mom cut loose - as any good hostesses would.

Besides, the trio might have been busy with their friends. It was a graduation fiesta, after all, so good food will be followed by goodbyes. When school ends later this month, these fifth-graders - many have been together since kindergarten - will go their separate ways to a number of middle schools.

"We won't all be spending as much time together," said Genesis Nunez. But she said she and pal Sarah Monterroso will see each other for birthdays.

Thanks to this experience, they've probably already planned the menu.

Tips from the 5th grade

At Public School 163's dinner party, salad was served with "Rush Hour Vinaigrette," whose name arose from a lesson about the four food tastes: salty, sweet, bitter and sour.

When student Genesis Nunez sampled a vinaigrette chef Feliberto Estevez made with vegetable oil, rice wine vinegar, lime, ginger, mustard, cilantro, pepper and salt, the youngster said, "It's like rush hour on my tongue." The name stuck and helped make last week's menu memorable.

In addition to having lots of desserts, the kids gave these suggestions for dinner-party success.

- "Plan ahead," says Christopher Dela Rosa. "And have a backup plan." When linens didn't arrive last week, paper napkins were substituted.
- "Keep things simple," says Josiah Mercer.
- "A theme makes things fun," says Emma Diaz. "A fun color is one idea."

- "Ask parents and friends to help," says Naomi Guzman. Last week, moms and dads came with desserts.

- "Don't forget about the entertainment," says Andrew Del Rosario. "People have to have a good time."

Originally published on June 12, 2005

 [Fresh stories hot off the site every day via RSS!](#)

 [Have stories like this emailed right to your inbox!](#)

 [Email this story](#)

 [Printer-friendly version](#)



[Home](#) | [News & Views](#) | [Sports](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Business](#) | [Boroughs](#) | [City Life](#) | [Services](#)

All contents © 2005 Daily News, L.P.
[Disclaimer and Copyright Notice](#) | [Our Privacy Policy](#)

LEFT