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Leisurely Luncheons With the Ladies

By MARSHALL HEYMAN



Here's the problem with ladies' luncheons: they take a really big chunk out of your day. And it must be the season for it, because in the last six weeks we've been invited to a boatload of them. For the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation; for the "2011 Outstanding Mother Awards"; for the Audubon Society's Women in Conservation. The call time for cocktails is usually around 11 a.m., lunch is served at 1, and then you don't get out of there until 2:30 pm. That's 3½ hours of your day.



Andrew Fitzsimon/PatrickMcMullan.com

Gillian Minitzer with Karen LeFrak



Leandro Justen/PatrickMcMullan.c

Mary McFadden

"And you have to look halfway decent," said Samantha Boardman, who has bought a table at the Rockefeller Women and Science Luncheon since she was in medical school. "Especially in May, you could fill your week going to these lunches. That's where you have to pick and choose."

There are benefits to the luncheon versus the evening gala. "You can get more women to a luncheon of all age groups," said Stephanie Winston Wolkoff, who was co-chairwoman of The Food Allergy Initiative's spring luncheon in April. "It's mixing in your mother-in-law, your mother and all your friends. When your kids are in school there's more flexibility. From 6 to 8 at night, you want to be there with them."

During the day, added Gillian Minitzer, who makes sure the Central Park Conservancy's annual hat luncheon runs swimmingly, "women don't need a date. You can invite your friends and it can be a fun day together. There aren't that many events or occasions that are like that."

Each of the aforementioned women spoke of the time commitment a big charity lunch entails. To try to prevent luncheon fatigue, when helping with the Women of Influence lunch hosted by the UJA-Federation of New York's Professional Women's Philanthropy arm, Ms. Winston Wolkoff (who was also honored, alongside Darcy Miller Nussbaum and Jessica Seinfeld) purposely asked for small tables—between four and 10 women—a buffet lunch to save time, and employed her friend Robert Verdi to moderate. "It was more informal," she said.



Leandro Justen/PatrickMcMullan.c

Sandra Lee with Dr. Rosemarie Ingleton at the Central Park Conservancy's 29th annual Frederick Law Olmstead awards luncheon.



Richard Koek/PatrickMcMullan.com

Erica Reid, Veronica Webb and Malaak Compton-Rock at the Food Allergy Initiative's spring luncheon at Cipriani 42nd Street.



David X Prutting/BFAnyc.com

Nancy Kissinger at the 14th annual Women and Science Spring Lecture and Luncheon at Rockefeller University.

Here are four luncheons we went to this last month so you could have your salad in front of your computer and get three hours more of work (read: three more hours of Angry Birds playing) done.

Dior's New York-Presbyterian Lying-In Hospital Annual Fashion Show and Luncheon

Where: Cipriani 42nd Street.

Number of guests: 261

What a table cost: Between \$5,000 and \$25,000.

Money raised: \$510,550 for New York's first hospital devoted to women and childbirth. (It was founded in 1799.)

For lunch: Asparagus vinaigrette; poached halibut with salsa verde Russian salad and micro greens; vanilla crème meringue cake.

What makes it different: The lunch is built around a runway, so that the French fashion house can show off its latest wares in a runway show.

Parting gift: A box of Dior chocolates.

The 14th Annual Women and Science Lecture and Luncheon

Where: Rockefeller University, at 66th and York.

Number of guests: 550

What a table cost: \$3,500.

Money raised: More than \$1 million for research at the university to support such things as postdoctoral and graduate fellows.

For lunch: Saffron-marinated chicken breast with roasted olives and lemons; fresh fava beans with mushrooms and spices; rice salad with grapes and fresh peas; strawberry-rhubarb cobbler with vanilla ice cream and sugar crisp cookies.

What makes it different: Lunch is preceded by a scientific lecture. This year's was a conversation between Rockefeller scientist Dr. Leslie VossHall and noted scent-master Frédéric Malle about the art and science of scent.

Parting gift: Scientific knowledge, including the fact, which arose during this year's lecture, that asparagus makes everyone's urine smell funny, but not everyone is able to smell it.

The Food Allergy Initiative's 12th Annual Spring Luncheon



David X Prutting/BFAnyc.com

Silda Wall Spitzer

Where: Cipriani 42nd Street.

Guests: More than 600.

What a table cost: \$7,500 to \$15,000.

Money raised: More than \$780,000 for food-allergy research.

For lunch: Chilled English pea soup, Branzino al Forno filet with fresh seasonal vegetables; vanilla crème meringue cake, cookies, fruit tarts and chocolate covered strawberries.

What makes it different: Aside from video presentations outlining the mission of the organization, this year's luncheon featured "safe food" in bright colors on all the tables for patrons "to bring home to all of their children and their grandchildren," said Ms. Winston Wolkoff. We're talking gumballs and jelly beans.

Parting gift: More food, including allergen-free doughnuts from Doughnut Planet; cookies to-go and a bag full of nut-free snacks, including samples of peanut-free peanut butter, otherwise known as soybutter. We haven't tried it yet.

The 29th Annual Frederick Law Olmsted Awards Luncheon

Where: The Central Park Conservancy Garden

Guests: More than 1,200.

What a table cost: Between \$12,500 and \$50,000.

Money raised: \$3.2 million to help further the work of the Central Park Conservancy, the most the organization raises at a single event, said Ms. Minter.

For lunch: Goat cheese watermelon salad; asparagus and parmesan flatbread topped with caramelized figs and almonds; herb-roasted free range chicken with baby Cremini mushrooms; tomato cornbread cobbler; wheatberry farro salad; old-fashioned strawberry shortcake.

What makes it different: All of the women wear hats. This year, instead of the generic term, many attendees employed vocabulary the royal wedding made famous to describe their head gear: fascinators. A major theme this go-around was butterflies.

Parting gift: It's always a large umbrella. This spring's color was lilac.



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Charlotte Sarkozy at Dior hosts the New York Presbyterian Lying-In Hospital Fashion Show and Luncheon.

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