

## ALASKA JOURNAL OF COMMERCE:

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### G<sup>3</sup> Dinners: Growing New Connections

by Tim Pearson

Interesting people expand my horizons. When I was twelve years old growing up in Teller, Alaska, I met Dr. David M. Hopkins, the geologist and world's leading authority on the Bering Land Bridge theory. He was on the Seward Peninsula looking for giant Redwood trees (Sequoia) just south of the Arctic Circle – actually he was looking for Redwood cones and pollen left in deep layers of mud from millennia past. And yes, he found Redwood pollen north of Nome. I didn't become a geologist as a result, but it's forever changed my mental picture of Nome. I can now see in my mind's eye, a forest of giant trees marching down to the balmy shores of the Bering Straits or at least, Beringia.

Such people increase my professional and personal net worth by giving me new ideas, new resources, and a whole new forest of opportunities and perspectives. Since January, I've been conducting an experiment in increasing my people flow – the numbers of people with whom I have unusually high quality conversations. To do so, I host what I call a G<sup>3</sup> Dinner – “G Three” for Great People, Great Time, Great Stories. The early results: it's worked with 18 people, not including the 16 with schedule conflicts who asked to be kept in mind for the future.

Once a month, I go through my Rolodex and come up with seven people. I look for interesting people who would like to meet other interesting people. I then invite them to dinner. I tell them that the dinner is free and the conversation is \$30, restaurant tip inclusive. I get grins and their attention. I'm quite intentional about the invitations. I make sure that I want to introduce each person to at least one other person in the group. For example, I knew that Demuri is from the country of Georgia and that years ago Derek had worked in Georgia building homes for Habitat for Humanity. I also knew they didn't know each other, but I felt sure they'd find something to talk about. What I hadn't counted on was the “It's a Small World” effect. It turned out Derek had met Demuri's wife, an American, in Georgia.

So apart from synchronicity, how does a G<sup>3</sup> dinner work? It runs from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm, usually on a Thursday evening. We rarely leave before 9 pm, since people lose track of time. The location is important. Rabah Chattfour owns one of my favorite restaurants: Aladdin's on Old Seward Highway ([www.aladdinsak.com](http://www.aladdinsak.com)). Along with the invitation, I send the menu choices: Lamb Tajin with Pears (*a delightful combination with subtle flavors from Morocco*) or Fesanjan Persian Style (*breast of chicken cooked in a pomegranate, walnuts and pistachio sauce*). That really gets people's attention. Also, Rabah serves a meal in such a way that you never feel it is coming too slow or too fast. What that does is sustain and support the conversation. Great timing in service is invisible. Combined with great food it's delicious. Among the options for dessert, the Bread of Tunisia is described as: *baked almonds, walnuts and ground bread and soaked in honey, lemon and orange blossom water*. Enough said.

And how goes the conversation? It's almost effortless in Alaska. After introductions, the first question is: “How long have you been in Alaska? Or how did you get here?” Everyone's got a story – usually humorous and often intending to stay only two years. And if you were born here, that's all the more interesting. The follow-up is, “What's your most unusual Alaska story?” Everyone has at least one of these as well, ranging from watching the wind in Unalaska blow the windsocks straight out in opposite directions at each end of the runway to living in an Alaska tree house.

So what's the business case for doing this? The best part is that there is no overt business case. People comment on how refreshing it is to sit and have conversations with interesting people outside of their profession or industry and not to have strings attached. There is of course, mutual benefit: attorneys, management accountants, lodge owners, stockbrokers, university professors, school administrators, program directors, sales managers, and HR directors all have intersecting interests. For dinner guests, just knowing other people in other professions is invaluable since people turn to people they know for tips in dealing with challenges: leads on a job search, a music teacher for the kids, or news of what's happening in other parts of Alaska. And as for me, my clients value the depth and diversity of my network. The more the merrier.

Who else in the world does this? Johan Tandberg, a friend and business coach in Lund, Sweden gets together monthly with friends for what he calls the Café of Life – a reminder to take time to enjoy life. Frank and Kathy Eagle in Fairbanks host a Wine Tasting on Wednesdays. In London, Carole Stone hosts monthly cocktail parties for 100 people at a time. She has 14,000 people in her database and 1,000 people turn out for her Christmas Party at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. The common denominator is what coach Adam Seaman says is the belief that “Good people ought not be strangers.”

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