

Café Flora, Bailey-Boushay celebrate 20 years

BY ERICA THOMPSON

Twenty years ago, the Madison Valley neighborhood had few modern apartment buildings and fewer local businesses. Café Flora and the Bailey-Boushay House brought new life to the area and continue to support each other today.

Café Flora, a high-end vegetarian restaurant, opened in October 1991, after an abandoned Laundromat was gutted to accommodate it. Its owners were determined to show Seattleites something they had never seen before.

"There had been a couple of vegetarian restaurants, but it was a lot of brown rice and stir fry and that kind of thing," said Nat Stratton-Clarke, who's owned Café Flora for the last four years. "The original owners had been to other places in the U.S., and they thought, 'We need to bring this back to Seattle, where there's such amazing produce and people really want it.'"

The Bailey-Boushay House opened shortly after, in June 1992, and became the nation's first 24-hour, skilled-nursing facility for people living with HIV and AIDS. It was built from the ground up by the AIDS Housing of Washington, now known as Building Changes, which later transferred ownership to Virginia Mason Medical Center.

A lot of fear and lack of education about AIDS caused many people living nearby not to support the new addition to the neighborhood.

"They were scared that there was going to be druggies in the area. They were scared of the disease being in the area.... You can imagine, this was a disease back then where we were having people die nearly every single day, and people didn't want that on their doorstep," said Alison Webster, residential-care charge nurse at the Bailey-Boushay House.

However, Café Flora welcomed the new organization and has supported it by hosting fund-raisers and other events.

Brian Knowles, executive director at Bailey-Boushay, said the surrounding families and businesses now offer 100-percent support, and the agency has an "amazing connection with the neighborhood."



■ The Bailey-Boushay House, 2720 E. Madison St., celebrates 20 years of helping people with HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening conditions. courtesy of BAILEY-BOUSHAY HOUSE

Community, miracles

Changes like these have enabled the two businesses to evolve over the last 20 years.

Café Flora, which now serves about 2,000 customers each week, renovated the outside patio several years ago to create an enclosed atrium with plants, running water and heated floors to adapt to the Seattle winter weather. Sliding panel windows were installed for use on summer days. It has also introduced alcoholic beverages, breakfast and happy hour to its menu.

"I like to think that we're a community space," Stratton-Clarke said. "I think that we are lucky to have people who come two or three times a week, who live in the community."

Beyond structural changes, the Bailey-Boushay House has adapted to the introduction of treatment for HIV and AIDS and has transformed from a place where people came to pass away peacefully to an environment of hope and life.

Although Knowles recognizes that, for some, the disease is fatal, he said AIDS "is not always a death sentence like when we first opened."

Bailey-Boushay has also opened its doors to people with other life-altering diseases that other health-care services have trouble helping, such as Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS), Huntington's disease and cancer.

"Bailey's is truly a place of miracles," Webster said. "Whether it is people with mental-health issues who have been disenfranchised for so long and are so scared... who eventually can come to us and die peacefully with the dignity that all of us expect, because they finally found somewhere that they can call home and found people they can trust. Or there are the people that, when they come

in and have been given only two to three months to live and because of the care they've received, manage to walk out and participate in life again."

Neighborly support

Although these two businesses have introduced new lifestyles to the residents of Madison Valley, some things just never change.

"We have staff that have been here for [more than 15 years]," Stratton-Clarke said. "Similar to our menu, we have our classic dishes like the Oaxaca Tacos, which we've had since we opened 20 years ago, and then we have things that are kind of ever-changing with the seasons."

They also have not stopped supporting the Bailey-Boushay House. On Saturday, June 2, Café Flora held an anniversary party that turned the restaurant into a giant farmers market. The restaurant's farm partners served tastes from the produce each farmer supplies for them. Not only did their customers get to meet the people who grow their food, but all the ticket sales went directly to the Bailey-Boushay House.

"They are a great neighbor and a great supporter," Knowles said of Café Flora.



photo/ERICA THOMPSON

■ Café Flora is marking its 20th year at 2901 E. Madison St., with a celebration benefiting its neighbor Bailey-Boushay House.

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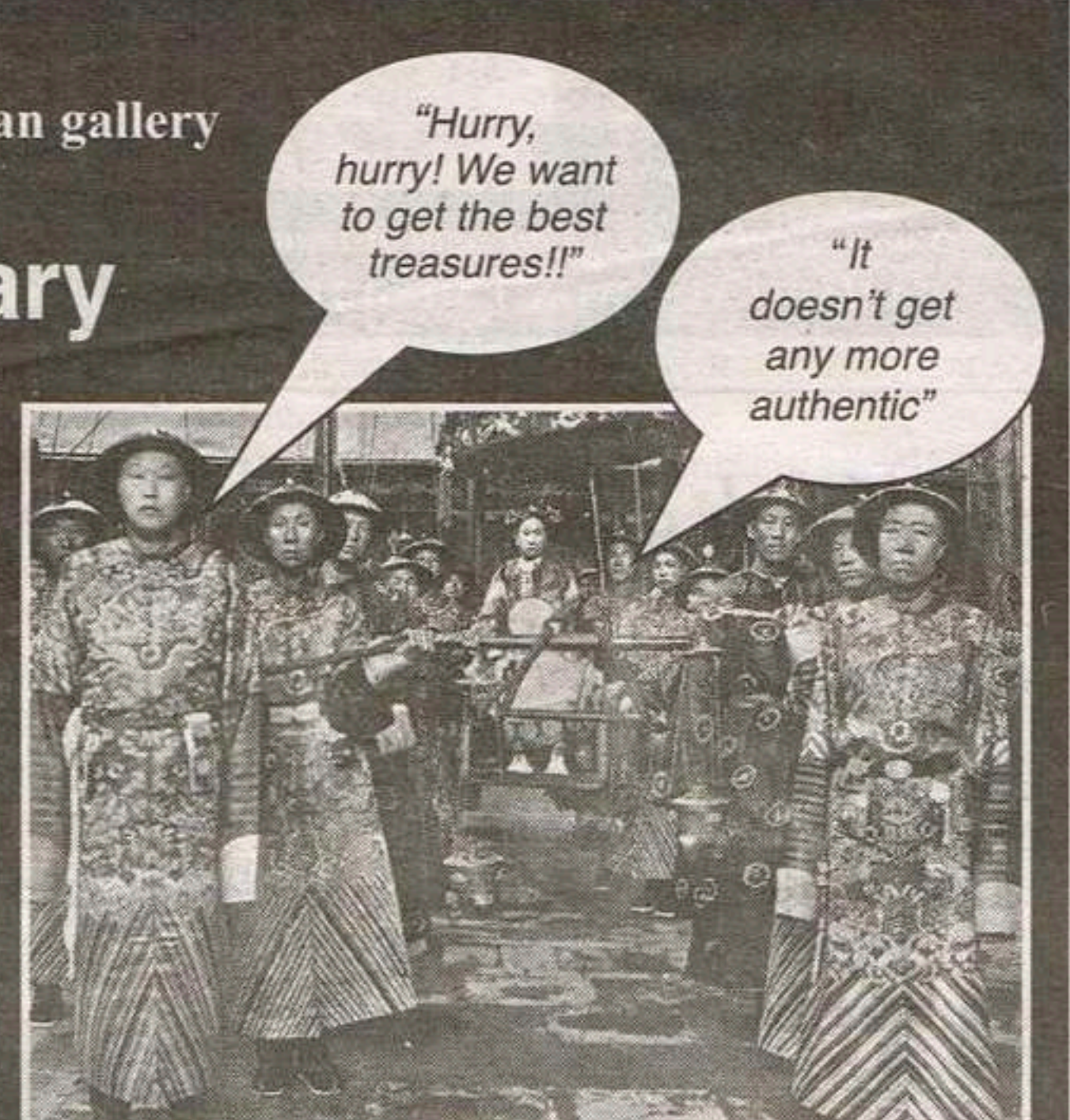
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