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1004.Joy.04 Dining Out

Whodunit? Collect the Clues at a Mystery Event Near You

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After Halloween, don't put that costume away. You'll need it for a mystery dinner party!

Mystery lovers are passionate about the fun and challenge of the whodunit in all of its many forms.

Mystery Dinner Parties

Carol McNair and Bob DeVoe of Ashland have hosted annual mystery dinner parties for six of their friends since 1991. Carol explained, "We started because we're mystery readers and we're very clever and we thought we could figure it out." But she admits that they almost never do. Bob shakes his head, "We are not, either one of us, the gregarious types, not at all. I don't know how we got into this." He loves the parties though, "It's sort of a license to be silly." Carol agrees, "Yeah, who knew we'd all turn out to be big hams."

Carol and Bob use pre-packaged mystery games from *How to Host a Murder or Murders by Vincent* to organize the evening. Episodes from these series and others are available locally at Fun Again Games in Ashland. Each party is unique, the mystery, characters, costumes and menu based on the theme of the game.

Every game starts with a dead body and then its whodunit for the next six hours as each participant tries their best to trick another into a revealing an important clue. Bob says, "It gets to be a bantering, badgering sort of thing, all very friendly and fun." One of the gamers always cries when pressed, "That's part of her role," Carol notes.

Costumes Make the Mystery

Bob is an artist and loves the costumes best. "You find an old curtain in the footlocker and that becomes your cape." For *Roman Ruins*, Bob was Licentius Caesar and Carol was Rotunda Imaculata. Bob described their costumes: "I glued together the robes (he didn't have a sewing machine) and used purple marker to draw the designs along the edges."

Nola Silverman, the owner of Gypsy Rose in Ashland, knows when a mystery party is afoot: "They come in with invitations that describe the character and we do our best to fit the character and fit the person." Gypsy Rose can outfit almost anyone, "Sometimes its really obscure characters where we might be cannibalizing 2 or 3 different costumes or sometimes it's as basic as a flapper."

Mystery Dinner Theater at the Ashland Springs Hotel

The Ashland Springs Hotel tentatively plans to hold several mystery dinner theater events in January and February 2005. General Manager Nanci Grabner commissioned Gumshoe

Gourmet to write a murder mystery specifically for the hotel. “Everybody says there is a ghost, actually several ghosts depending on who you talk to.” Nanci discovered mystery dinner theater last year when she took a ride on the Crooked River Dinner Train in Redmond, Oregon. An 1880’s western murder mystery takes place on the Friday evening excursions.

The Western Mystery Dinner Train in Redmond, Oregon

The train ride is four hours long and Nanci says it goes by fast. “Pretty soon you get to know everybody in the boxcar and everybody’s talking who do you think it is, well I don’t think it was that because of this and everybody become sort of an I-Spy person.”

Floyda Sauer of Lakeview and her husband Dale took the mystery train last summer. Floyda says, “There was a shooting off the train before we even left the station.” To solve the mystery, everyone asks the actors questions. “There was a lot of interaction – you could ask them anything you wanted. I asked about a bb hole in the glass, was it part of the murder or just part of the train. You don’t have any idea about what is a clue or not.” Floyda loved the mystery train, “We all guessed wrong. We were wrong, both of us. That’s what we really enjoyed.”

Mystery, Food and Friends Make the Party

Mystery and good food and old or new friends make for a marvelous evening. If a mystery dinner party isn’t your thing, try mystery dinner theater instead. If you want to be involved, well, go ahead – dress up as a 20s flapper and ask lots of questions. If you’d rather not get involved, all well and good – just sit back and let the actors take center stage. Enjoy your delicious gourmet dinner and have a great time watching the fun as the mystery surrounds you.