

Zeinab Mroue + Rob Trufant



YpaZKEwy

Entry details

Entry Name: Dickens' Dinner

Institution Name: Michigan State University

Entry Completed By (*name and position*): Zeinab Mroue - Event Operations Manager, Rob Trufant - Executive Chef

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Introduction:

The annual Dickens Dinner is part of Michigan State University's Experiential Dining series, a residential dining program where students use meal swipes from their dining plans to attend one-of-a-kind culinary events. This dinner has become a unique tradition transporting guests to 19th-century London. The English-inspired menu features aristocratic favorites and quotes from the novels of Charles Dickens, brought to life by an accomplished guest chef from Liverpool who wanted to recreate the holidays of his youth for our students at the State Room.

Essay:

The Dickens Dinner is a unique experience for students to enjoy gourmet service and food as a part of their dining plan; the menu this year was influenced by favorites from the British aristocracy, with modern twists and presentations to ensure relevancy and excitement for the students. From being greeted at the door with a "Smoking Bishop" – a warm mulled beverage – to mingle with other patrons before being seated to an elaborately decorated table in a seasonally inspired room for the six-course meal, the experience stimulated all of the senses and sensibilities of our student guests.

Introduction:

The Dickens Dinner originated years ago to bring a taste of Senior Executive Chef Michael Clyne's home to MSU. Originally offered as a special event to patrons of The State Room, it quickly became a beloved tradition the community embraced warmly with continued demand. When the Experiential Dining series launched, the dinner was reimaged for students and soon became one of its most anticipated events. There was never an intention for this story to have so many chapters — but the community kept asking for more. Each year it has evolved, from the World Cup, to celebrity, and most recently royalty.

Essay:

Guests were immersed in their evening at the entrance to the State Room, which was transformed by student staff in a time-defying flip to the warmth of an English winter holiday, complete with Christmas Crackers and inspired décor. The lull of seasonal music, the hum of students enjoying the festivities, and the enticing scents of unique dishes filled the dining room. Once seated, selected readings and course introductions were from none other than the creative mind behind the meal, Senior Executive Chef Michael Clyne, who was serving up his final dinner before retiring from MSU. Ambiance was complete with a local student choral group entertaining guests with holiday music during the intermezzo, followed by the entrée and dessert, and a special surprise for the chef.

Introduction:

The dinner is always a sold-out affair, so marketing it to students begins early to increase visibility, engagement, and create excitement; this happens digitally through social media and e-mail blasts, as well as physically with table tents and signage. The MSU Eat at State Website also lists the Experiential Dining events for the year. Post-event, guests are encouraged to fill out an experience survey for feedback that we can utilize to ensure future successes.

Essay:

Getting ahead of marketing and ensuring student engagement was paramount to planning the experience; this year marked a special celebration as the final – unless we can convince him to make a special appearance – Dickens Dinner to be presented by Senior Executive Chef Michael Clyne before his retirement. To commemorate the Liverpool native and lifelong fan of Liverpool Football Club, guests and staff signed a soccer ball and donned Liverpool F.C. fan gear as a surprise at the end of the event - adding additional flair to the already special evening. In addition to being wowed with all the theming, entertainment, and culinary delights for the evening, the students truly enjoyed celebrating him and the impact he has had on our dining program throughout the years.

Introduction:

With multisensory and immersive dining experiences becoming more of the norm, the Dickens Dinner was not only ahead of the curve for experiential dining but continues to evolve and set the bar for other events on campus. Utilizing Campus and Michigan-grown, raised, and sourced ingredients, local vendors, and repurposed décor, in addition to a tight production schedule, made for a sustainable event with a more global theme.

Essay:

Collaboration is key in executing high-level events successfully – from our management and full-time staff leadership and oversight, to our business office and marketing and communications team, down to our student staff's tireless efforts, the goal is always to have a full house and happy guests – but ultimately we couldn't do it if we didn't have the collective vision of inclusive excellence. The team is here to serve up excellence for students, and without their involvement, listening to their interests, and feedback, we wouldn't be able to have long-standing traditions that stand the test of time and create these memorable experiences for them.

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Attachment name

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