

September 14, 2011

GRUB WITH US GATHERS STRANGERS FOR SOCIAL MEALS

## Guess who's coming to dinner?

By TENLEY WOODMAN

Armed with a reservation and a cocktail, I was ready for an adventure. My mission: to share

a meal with a table of strangers.

Grub With Us, a social network that organizes family-style meals for the unacquainted, launched in Boston in June. It started a year ago when college buddies Daishin Sugano and Eddy Lu, both 30, relocated to Chicago.

"It was a new city that we moved to and we didn't have any friends. It was hard,"

Sugano said. Sugano and Lu decided to parlay their love of eating into a no-pressure, social opportunity.

"Food is very casual. At the meal, the food serves as an ice-breaker," Sugano said. Since last fall, the duo have spread Grub With Us to New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and, most recently, Boston.

Users create a free profile





at grubwithus.com, similar to Facebook and other social sites, and use it to reserve a seat and prepay for the meal. Those brave enough to sign up first pay less than the last person (prices range from \$20-\$30).

As the fourth to sign up, I paid \$28 for a three-course nosh at Marlave — which featured its famed tidbits (gooey cheese and bacon sopped up with toasted baguette), salad, ravioli, pizza, fish and chips, and truffles.

Our eclectic group included a former computer programmer, an advertising media planner, a public relations specialist and another writer. The maximum number of participants for most dinners is eight.

Dan Winkler, 48, of Millis sought out the dinner for the social factor. "This thing attracts very outgoing people," Winkler said.

It was everyone's first dinner, and nervous chatter about how we each discovered the site subsided once the plates started hitting the table. The mac and cheese — made with farmhouse cheeses, cream and black

truffle oil — was an instant hit, as were the simple ricotta-filled raviolis. Most showed up to Marlave to test their palates, but diners don't need to be gourmands to enjoy.

"I don't think this really is for foodies. Foodies will have specific ideas about where they want to go," Winkler said about the random, pre-chosen destinations.

The real focus is to make new friends and have a good time.

He was so happy with his experience that he went back for seconds — signing up for another Grub With Us meal at the Salty Pig in the Back Bay.

During the hour-and-a-half dinner, our group chatted about hometowns, occupations and film, all topics safely within the Grub With Us meal etiquette guidelines.

Diners don't need to know Emily Post by heart, but are asked to silence mobile phones and abstain from rants on politics, religion or war. And if you're looking for a night of drinking — forget it.

STAFF PHOTOS BY STUART CAHILL

**TABLE TALK:** Grub With Us participants, left, share a meal at the Salty Pig in the Back Bay.

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT:** Robin Sosnow, left, serves as a Grub With Us 'ambassador,' helping to keep the evening on track. Dan Winkler, Anand Vankawala, Sosnow and Daniel Rinehart, from left, listen to a story from table mate Jill Agnello, right, at a Grub With Us dinner at the Salty Pig restaurant.



"I really like the rules. It makes everybody think about their own behavior," said Robin Sosnow, 24,

a third-year law student at Suffolk University and an "ambassador" for Grub With Us. As such, Sosnow

sits near the Grub With Us table, just to make sure the evening stays on track.

"If someone is hogging

the food, if someone is getting drunk, then the meal failed in its purpose."

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