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Tammy Loewy, left, and Martha Pritchard Spear serve up some Ethiopian and Eritrean cuisine at the home of Harris and Sue Semegram Thursday, March 23 during a Rotary Club of Lake Placid fundraising dinner to benefit the club's international projects. (News photo — Andy Flynn)

LAKE PLACID — Members of the Rotary Club of Lake Placid raised about \$1,000 on Thursday, March 23, during a dinner of east African cuisine to benefit their international projects.

Rotarians Harris and Sue Semegram hosted the fundraiser at their Lake Placid home. Earlier in the day, they picked up the food from A Taste of Abyssinia in South Burlington, Vermont, where 2023 James Beard Award semifinalist Alganesh Michael regularly prepares traditional food from Ethiopia and her native country of Eritrea.

Before the meal, the 22 people in attendance watched Michael explain the dishes on a computer monitor, using the Zoom videoconferencing platform.

“I wish I could have been there to see you all in person,” Michael said. “The food you are about to eat represents both countries, Ethiopia and Eritrea. I have flavors of spice, curry, savory and sourdough, which is the bread.”

On the menu were injera (fermented bread), rice (a gluten-free option), spiced beef, curried chicken, two kinds of lentils (brown and yellow), mildly seasoned collard greens, cabbage with shredded carrots and shiro, a ground chickpea sauce (spicy).



Vermont chef Alganesh Michael talks to diners at the home of Harris and Sue Semegram on Thursday, March 23 – via Zoom – about her Ethiopian and Eritrean cuisine during a Rotary Club of Lake Placid fundraising dinner to benefit the club’s international projects. (News photo – Andy Flynn)

“Make sure you try them separate before you start mixing them,” Michael said.

Traditionally, families from Ethiopia and Eritrea eat communally around a big platter.

“We put the injera, which is the bread, on the platter,” she said. “And then you sit around, maybe four or five, however big the family is. I’m one of nine, so we had a big platter or plate ... and then we sit together and then we say grace and we dig in with our hands. We eat with our hands.

“So try to experience the culture as you enjoy the food and the flavors.”

The idea for an Ethiopian dinner came from former Rotary Club president Martha Pritchard Spear, whose 15-year-old adopted son is of Ethiopian ancestry. They've eaten food from A Taste of Abyssinia in the past as part of an exploration and celebration of his roots.



From left, Chandler Ralph and Mary Welch serve up some Ethiopian and Eritrean cuisine at the home of Harris and Sue Semegram Thursday, March 23 during a Rotary Club of Lake Placid fundraising dinner to benefit the club's international projects. Waiting in line, from left, are Christian Brammer and Sarina Nicola. (News photo — Andy Flynn)

“The other reason it’s just yummy,” Pritchard Spear said.

While Michael was a semifinalist for this year’s James Beard Awards — for Best Chef: Northeast (CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT) — she was not among the five finalists in that category, announced on Wednesday, March 29.

“I don’t even have my own brick-and-mortar, but I am nominated for this huge, prestigious award,” she told the Rotary Club diners as she wrapped up her Zoom call. “I am so honored and humbled by it. ... I will never know who nominated me. ... Any more questions?”

“When can we eat?” Pritchard Spear said.

During the event, diners chose from a selection of Ethiopian wine, and for dessert, there was fresh fruit and baklava, made by International Service Committee chair Chandler Ralph.



From left, Kate Thompson, JD Duval and Susan Friedmann serve up some Ethiopian and Eritrean cuisine at the home of Harris and Sue Semegram Thursday, March 23 during a Rotary Club of Lake Placid fundraising dinner to benefit the club's international projects. (News photo — Andy Flynn)

Tammy Loewy, a co-owner of the Green Goddess Natural Market in Lake Placid, was one of the diners. She's had Ethiopian food before because of the many vegetarian dishes that are traditional to the cuisine.

"For us, my family being vegetarian, that's one of the foods that we gravitated to," Loewy said. "I love the rich, rich flavors of Ethiopian food and the eating with injera."

Loewy's family has a tradition based on Ethiopian food.

"When we go to New York City, we go to see a show, but we always eat Ethiopian before we see a show," she said.

Loewy liked all the dishes she ate, but she gravitated toward the shiro.

"That's kind of really flavorful and a little bit spicy," she said. "That was definitely my favorite."

Sarina Nicola attended the dinner with her husband David. They're the owners of Mr. Mike's Pizza & Italian Restaurant in Lake Placid.

"I liked the beef, and I liked the lentils and the veggies, the cabbage, the collard greens," Sarina said. "I added a little bit of spice ... to all of it, and I added a little salt."

Sarina was attracted to the Ethiopian dinner because she wanted to try some food that isn't available in Lake Placid.

"I like trying different foods," she said. "There's not that much diversity of foods around here."

Before the diners served up their food, which was laid out buffet style on the counter between the kitchen and the dining room, Harris thanked them for their donation, which was set at a suggested donation of \$50 or more, per person.

"Your donation supports these projects in many parts of the world," he said.

Some of the past international service projects funded by the Lake Placid Rotary Club include:

- five Java model cook stoves for families in Guatemala
- educational fees for three girls over three years in Uganda, a partnership with the Rotary Club of Ottawa and Mbarara, Uganda
- the cost of shipping 32 incubators to Harare, Zimbabwe, in partnership with the Rotary Club of Ottawa
- food and rice for the Wildflower home in Thailand through Together We Can Change the World
- donations to victims of the explosion in Beirut, Lebanon, through the LA Rotary Cedars Club
- mattresses for residents of Puerto Rico who experienced the devastation from Hurricane Maria in 2018
- pediatric endoscopy equipment in Croatia, through the Rotary Club of Zagreb Maksimar
- school reconstruction efforts in Haiti
- support for a dental clinic in Cambodia through a Rotary Club in Colorado and Together We Can Change the World
- support for the cost of identity papers for the LGBT community in Jakarta

- a global grant to build a vocational school in Ghana, with the Cornwall Sunrise Club
- support to pay for a mobile operating theater to provide ophthalmology services to rural areas in India
- providing safe drinking water and improved sanitation at Kyoga Village in Uganda, coordinated with the Rotary Club of Vancouver, and further donations to the Rotary Hygiene and Sanitation Social Enterprise LTD in Kampala, Uganda to provide sanitary pads for girls who otherwise may not be able to afford them

The Lake Placid Rotary Club left its diners with one message: “By partnering with Rotary Clubs around the globe, we can have a substantial impact in making the world a better place.”