Elby Awards will have even more glitter this year

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Karri Peifer
kpeifer@richmond.com

Dust off your disco garb, Richmond, because the 2015 Elby Awards are nearly here — and this year the theme is "Studio 54."

In four short years, the Elbys have quickly become the most prestigious dining award for the Richmond restaurant industry. Started by Richmond Magazine in 2011, this award is the top honor a local restaurant can get, and the annual award ceremony is a must-attend event for anyone involved in — or obsessed with — Richmond dining.

"The Elbys are a mashup of the 33-year-old Rammys in D.C., the Richmond Theater Critic Circle Awards and a bit of the irreverent MTV Video Music Awards rolled in with the fashion from the Met Costume Gala since we have the event at the VMFA. It's also a fundraiser for four nonprofits," said Susan Winiecki, Elby founder (and Richmond Magazine associate publisher).

The ceremony, held Jan. 25 at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, "recognizes a winner from four nominees in 10 categories." Nominees are selected by 30 industry professionals, including food writers and culinary instructors; the winners are selected by outside judges.

New this year is a red carpet, pre-party reception at VMFA, with cocktails and appetizers from Kitchen on Cary. The after-party is once again in VMFA's marble hall, with food from the Culinard and J. Sargeant Reynolds culinary arts programs, cocktails from Belle Isle Moonshine, and wine from Tap 26 — with lots of disco fun happening in the background.

"Celebrating 40 years of disco on the Billboard charts and the almost 40th birthday of Studio 54 seemed appropriate for the fourth Elbys in 2015, Andy Warhol loved Studio 54, and the VMFA has plenty of Warhol," Winiecki said.

Restaurant of the Year, Best New Restaurant, Chef of the Year and Best Cocktail Program are a few of the regular categories, and this year there are a few new ones, including best beer program and purveyor.

"This year, we included beer, wine and cocktail programs as separate categories because our dining community has grown. Purveyor is a new category, suggested after last year's ceremony by co-host Jason Tesauro as well as by our new food editor," Winiecki said.

The full list of categories and winners can be found on Richmond.com. The nominees for Restaurant of the Year are Heritage (also nominated last year), Peter Chang China Café, The Roosevelt (last year's winner in this category) and Stella's.

The Best New Restaurant nominees are L'Opossum, Lucy's Restaurant, Metzger Bar & Butchery and The Rogue Gentlemen (last year, Estilo won). Contenders for Chef of the Year are Walter Bundy of Lemaire; Dylan Fultineer of Rappahannock (also nominated last year); Lee Gregory of The Roosevelt (last year's winner) and Joe Sparatta of Heritage (also nominated last year).

kpeifer@richmond.com
(804) 649-6321
Twitter: @KarriPeifer

2015 Elby Awards

When: Jan. 25; red carpet starts at 6 p.m.; awards at 7 p.m.; after-party at 8 p.m.


Tickets: $85; at richmondmagazine.com. Last year's event sold out.