

Chicagoans to Rouse DC Scene

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As a new first family prepares to replace the drapes in the White House, their Washington neighbors are abuzz about the changes coming to what has become a sleepy social scene.

Observers expect the new first couple, who are young, intellectually curious and multicultural, to welcome world leaders, great thinkers, musicians and artists, as well as to populate Washington with energetic new people.

"Washington has been in a deep freeze for eight years," says David Adler, CEO and founder of BizBash Media Inc., publisher of a New York-based event industry trade magazine, and founder of the late Washington Dossier, which followed the Ford, Carter, Reagan and Bush I administrations. "All of a sudden, every major brand and icon in the world will want to come to D.C. and go to the White House. A state dinner will be the No. 1 ticket in the world."

The Bushes have never been much for White House dinners or Georgetown salons. A night out for George and Laura was a rarity, and their few ventures were usually out of the public eye, to a favorite Vietnamese restaurant.

"Until a new administration takes office, Washington as a social organism is essentially dead," Maureen Orth wrote in *Vanity Fair* a year ago.

Now, observers expect an Obama administration to reignite the Washington scene in much the way Ronald Reagan did after the Carter years.

"This is only comparable to when President Reagan won, when it was a complete turnover in every area of the city," says Tammy Haddad, a former MSNBC political news producer who covered the presidential campaign for *Newsweek.com* with the "TamCam," a small handheld video camera. "Washington is looking forward to a president who will entertain at the White House and bring more people in."

Ms. Haddad's springtime correspondents' brunch — a non-partisan affair well-stocked with political and media stars — is a much sought-after invitation.

SOUGHT-AFTER GUESTS

Incoming faces who are sure to be inundated with party invitations include Valerie Jarrett, David Axelrod, David Plouffe and Bill Burton.

"They'll be the No. 1 ask for dinner parties," Ms. Haddad says. "There's no question that the Chicago group will come in and dominate the social, political and diplomatic corps. People will fight mightily to get them at their tables."

Messrs. Plouffe and Axelrod, partners in Chicago-based AKP&D Message & Media; Ms. Jarrett, CEO of Habitat Co., and Obama finance chair Penny Pritzker are among a Chicago contingent that is especially tight with the president-elect. With each Cabinet appointment Mr. Obama makes, the social secretaries on Embassy Row and the party planners in Georgetown will be adding more names to their BlackBerrys.

Even Chicago executives with no plans to leave Illinois for jobs in Washington expect to spend some time there. Linda Johnson Rice, CEO of Johnson Publishing Co.; Desiree Rogers, president of social networking for Allstate Financial, a business unit of Allstate Corp., and Neal Zucker, CEO of Corporate Cleaning Services, are talking about occasionally taking their standing weekend lunch date with Ms. Jarrett to Washington.

"Chicago folks are going to have special tables at places like Café Milano and the Palm," Ms. Haddad says. "When they walk in, everyone at the bar will notice them. It's the big local thing."



Real estate executives already are taking Obama staffers on home tours in D.C. and its suburbs. Restaurants are tweaking menus with dishes that say Chicago, just as they did when Reagan (California cuisine), Carter (grits) and the Bushes (barbecue) came to town. Art Smith, owner of Table 52 in the Gold Coast, will import Chicago's Allen Bros. steaks to his new restaurant, Art & Soul, in Washington's Liaison Capitol Hill, an Affinia Hotel. It's likely to become a favorite spot for Chicagoans visiting the city.

Close friends and colleagues expect to pal around with the Obamas at the White House just as they have in Chicago.

"We're planning on it," says Ariel Investments CEO John Rogers, a longtime friend who raised money for Mr. Obama and traveled with him during the campaign.

Mr. Rogers played basketball with Michelle Obama's brother, Craig Robinson, at Princeton University. Through the years, Mr. Rogers and others — including Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan, who has brushed off speculation that he might become education secretary — have bonded on the court with Mr. Obama.

"We're assuming there'll be a place to play either in the White House or near the White House," Mr. Rogers says.

Some of the cultural impact of the new administration may be blunted, though, by the country's fragile economic situation.

"If we didn't have an economic crisis, you'd see every major fashion designer, every major style maven adapting Michelle Obama's style and his style. It would be Camelot style, and there would be a name to it," says Mr. Adler, the trade magazine executive who has followed numerous presidencies. "The economy has changed that. They're going to be more careful about how they're perceived."

Indeed, the day-to-day after-work life of the Obamas is likely to center on their daughters. During the campaign, they fit in outings like a break by Ms. Obama to take Malia, 10, and Sasha, 7, to see the stage production of "High School Musical" in Chicago. In the run-up to Election Day, Mr. Obama escorted Sasha to a Halloween party at the Hyde Park home of Marty Nesbitt, president of Chicago-based PRG Parking Management LLC and an informal adviser to Mr. Obama.

"I expect they're going to keep their children's lives as normal as is humanly possible," says Hyde Park neighbor and friend Thomas McElroy, owner of Level-1 Global Solutions LLC, a Chicago-based security company. "I expect they'll let (their daughters') friends come and sleep over like any other parent with children. When a movie comes to town, they'll be like any other family and see it with their children."

LEARNING THE ROPES

Buffy Cafritz, long a member of Washington's social and cultural scene, expects the social life of the Obamas to warm up slowly.

"He's going to be enormously busy trying to solve all the problems in this country and mend relations abroad," she says. "I believe the first months will be subdued socially; all his energy and time will be with his key advisers and Cabinet, trying to solve our problems."

Having seen many presidents come and go, she says Washingtonians are disappointed when a president doesn't embrace the D.C. social scene, "but they really have no right to think the first family is supposed to mix socially."

"If they do, we enjoy it, but we shouldn't expect it," she says. "The Bushes were more comfortable with their Texas friends. The Clintons and Reagans were wonderful and very inclusive. It makes for an enjoyable time for everyone."

Sen. John McCain had derided "Georgetown cocktail parties" during the campaign.

As for the Obamas, Ms. Cafritz says, "they're a young, dynamic couple. Their socializing will reflect their energy."

Laurie Firestone, social secretary to George H.W. Bush, says the Obamas would be wise to hire a social secretary who understands Washington. "They'll have to understand how important entertaining at the White House is, and how you can use entertaining as a vehicle to accomplish your goals in office," says Ms. Firestone, author of a cookbook on state dinners for home entertaining.

"Each year they (presidents) go out less and less because of security and what you put the host or hostess or restaurant through," she adds. "They'll find it's easier if they have people come to them instead."

As the president-elect steps into the buzz of a new city and onto a worldwide stage, many social acquaintances from Chicago accept that they may be watching from afar.

"Everyone who has known Barack and watched him go from the neighborhood to state government and now the presidency, they know they won't have an opportunity to see him," says Mesirow Financial Holdings Inc. CEO James Tyree. "I'll be there anytime he says. But if I don't see him for eight years and just watch him doing a great job, I'm OK with that."

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