

## True Romance: Taste in dining sealed the deal

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By KATHLEEN GREEN / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

Going out on dates was a low priority for Della Whisenant. She had friends and family to fill most voids – except one.

"I was simply looking for someone to dance with at weddings and go to nice restaurants with," she says. "And one of my favorite restaurants is III Forks."

Della was still trying to adjust after losing her husband unexpectedly to illness years earlier. But when she found herself at home too many nights eating Symphony chocolate bars, she knew she should probably take her friends up on their yearlong offer to set her up with Bob Best.

So when Bob called and they started talking about how faith, family and friends sustained them when they lost their longtime spouses years before, she knew they had a very important common thread.

On Feb. 18, Bob and Della had dinner at Mi Piaci. Over the next four hours, they discovered uncanny similarities, including a shared birthday, right down to the year.



And then there was that one last sign.

"He happened to mention when we were leaving, 'By any chance do you happen to like III Forks?' " Della was amazed. They made their next date there for March 6.

"He was the first person I went out with and the only person," she says. "It was very evident that God's hand was in this."

Della was especially taken with how kind, honest, sweet and thoughtful Bob was. And Bob was struck by Della's generous spirit.

"When you have that many friends, you're a giver, not a taker," says Bob, who is chairman and CEO of Atmos Energy. "She goes all out. She has very strong personal values, a deep faith and she's cute."

Talk turned serious very quickly, especially one night when Bob and Della had dinner with a friend of Della's who is a minister and counselor. Bob asked him for advice.

"He said, 'Well, Bob. I look at it this way. It's a four-quarter game, and in the third quarter, you either call it love or you call it quits.' "

The "third quarter" fell right around October. And the timing couldn't have been more perfect. To celebrate their shared Oct. 8 birthdays, Bob decided to pop the question.

He took Della to dinner at the French Room in the Adolphus hotel. During a quiet moment, he set a box on the table and told her, "This is my commitment to you."

They talked about their time together and what they meant to each other, Bob says. However, Della wasn't the least bit surprised.

"I was completely expecting it," says Della, who keeps very busy with volunteer work. "He had given so many hints. And he was just sitting there grinning."

What Della didn't expect was for Bob to call her sons the next week and ask them for their blessing over lunch.

"I just love to be with Della," says Bob. "We're happy wherever we are. Really having a wonderful partner makes life that much more fulfilling."

Della and Bob, both 62, are looking at an intimate spring 2009 wedding.

"As we look back, we both instinctively knew early on. In my heart, I knew there was something very serious," she says. "I had said I'd never marry again, and boy, I did not know what I was saying."