

Making Your Special Events Special

By Heather Pardieck, Publications Committee Member

"Oh no, not another warm cheese and wine reception."

A common problem for meeting planners is to be stuck in a rut, doing the same event year after year. To break out of that rut, try two things: define your goals and use your imagination. The common goals for every event should be to achieve the desired attendance, make the event memorable and keep the guests entertained.

The event theme is the common denominator in achieving these three goals and is where imagination rules. Since the theme should be reflected throughout the event, you must be creative in choosing it. Don't rely only on your own powers of imagination-talk to other people who have great ideas in their business or personal lives, read trade magazines and event planning books and talk to vendors about recent events they thought were exceptional.

An event begins with the initial contact with invitees. That may be a suggestion of where next year's event will be held, a save-the-date card or an invitation. Each one of these devices should be as creative as possible. They should also accomplish the goal of making your guest interested in the upcoming event.

If you have annual events, end the last day with props or entertainment reflecting the next year's function.

Providing guests with a creative save-the-date card months before the actual invitation piques their curiosity and makes them anxious to attend. If you are doing a sports theme, send the card in the shape of a basketball or football with trivia questions about that sport. The answers will follow on the invitation that they will be anticipating.

The invitation should be a clear piece with all the vital information. The guest may be thoroughly impressed with the miniature bottle of cola attached to a 45 record for your 50's theme, but if they cannot read the date, they will not attend.

Not only should your guests be looking forward to the occasion, they should have a memorable experience. Begin at the beginning: have greeters dressed in outfits reflecting the theme and make decorations apparent from the moment guests arrive-in the parking garage, in front of the event location or in the guests' quarters, if necessary.

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When choosing a location, look outside the normal venues. If you are utilizing a sports theme, choose an arena or athletic field. It is much easier to select a unique location and decorate it than to start from scratch with a dull place. Once again, use your imagination in selecting locations. Most cities have many unusual sites—barns, museums, historic sites, trains, boats, etc.

To achieve your last goal—keeping guests entertained, remember: the key to most people's enjoyment is eating, drinking and engaging in some activity outside their normal routine. Food and drink should also reflect the event's theme, i.e. sushi and sake for Asian themes.

Games, prizes and entertainment will hold your guests' attention. Provide magicians, clowns and acrobatics for a circus theme, or horseshoes and a roping contest for a western theme. Music livens up any event but should also be coordinated with the theme. Authentic steel drum musicians provide the proper background for a Jamaican theme while properly-costumed folk musicians enhance a Renaissance party.

Whether your function is a small children's party or a major corporate event with a strong theme, remember your basic goals and add large doses of imagination. That will keep you out of a rut and guarantee your guests' satisfaction as well.

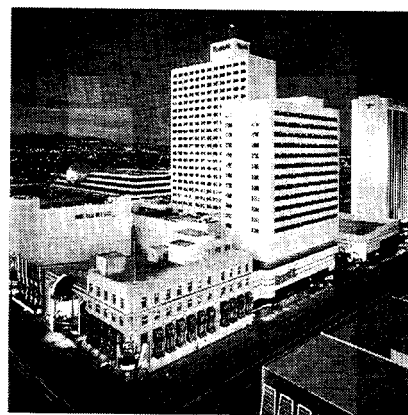
Heather Pardieck is president of events!, a special event planning company based in Sacramento.

1997/98 Board of Directors Slate

The 1997/98 Board of Directors Slate was developed by the Nominating Committee in accordance with the MPI/Sacramento by-laws. This year's slate marks the introduction of the newly approved board structure, adding vice presidents of functional areas instead of the traditional officer positions. You should already have received and returned your ballots; election results will be announced at the April luncheon.

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