

# Caterers, event planners simplify even largest events

By Karen Garlough

Planning a large event can be overwhelming but it can also be a rewarding experience if you have professional help. Select a caterer that is also an event planner and they will coordinate all the details, saving you time and maintaining your sanity.



*Karen Garlough is the owner of My Chef Catering in Naperville. As a full service caterer and event planner, My Chef has won numerous local and national awards.*

Contact her at 630-717-1167 or e-mail [kgarlough@mychef.com](mailto:kgarlough@mychef.com).

**Clearly define the event.** Define the type of event and what you want to accomplish during the event. Is it a grand opening, company picnic or customer appreciation? Is the goal of the event showcasing products and services, providing a fun family outing, or thanking your customers or employees?

Who will attend the event? Adults only? Mostly men or women? Any children? Will hearty or lighter appetites be present? Where will the event be held? In your office or an outside venue? Create a calendar to

determine due dates and a detailed timetable for the day of the event.

**Determine the style.** Is this a high profile event that requires gorgeous linen, stunning decorations, china and glassware or a self service, casual picnic where plastic tablecloths and disposables are sufficient?

**Establish a budget.** Establishing and communicating a realistic budget saves everyone a lot of time. You may have visions of ice carvings and chef-attended stations but your budget may dictate otherwise. An experienced caterer can quickly estimate what your budget will cover and, if need be, offer creative, affordable alternatives.

**Menu.** The format for most large corporate events is an open house which promotes lots of mingling. The menu is usually buffet or passed hors d'oeuvres. Chef-attended action stations are always popular and can range from high-end to affordable.

For a more formal affair, served dinners are typically more affordable than abundant buffets since they have a finite amount of food. Budget, type of event, time of day and demographics of your group will determine menu and quantities of food.

**Selecting a caterer.** Selecting an experienced caterer who is also an event planner is a great way to coordinate all the details and eliminate the expense of a separate event planner. Ask the caterer for references from an event similar to yours. A reference

for a great company picnic for 100 is worlds different than successfully executing a grand opening for 1,000.

With today's economic climate, make sure your caterer is financially stable. All caterers have different styles and price points so schedule a tasting before your commit. Your caterer should have professional staff, with basset-trained bartenders required if you are serving alcoholic beverages.

“Selecting an experienced caterer who is also an event planner is a great way to coordinate all the details and eliminate the expense of a separate event planner.”

Ask about the caterer's transport and handling of hot and cold food. As an example, if your company picnic is in August and you do not have adequate refrigeration onsite, a refrigerated van will be necessary to hold your food at a safe temperature.

**Supervising the event.** Throughout the planning process, you have probably been working with one contact person from your catering company and, depending on the size and complexity of your event, this person should be in attendance. Having them onsite will ensure smooth execution.

**Rentals.** If it's more complicated than making a call to rent tables and chairs, consider having your caterer handle the arrangements. Your caterer will: determine the items needed; placement of the tables, buffets and bars for the best traffic flow; check in rental items to make sure you don't have any shortages or equipment damages; supervise set up; arrange to have the required exit signs and fire extinguishers, etc.

**Compare apples with apples.** The least expensive quote doesn't always represent the best value. Catering is a competitive business and it is reasonable to assume that you get what you pay for. Ask for a comprehensive proposal with everything spelled out including a detailed event timetable, staff, beverages, quantities of food and any other services. Ask that all expenses be estimated including tax and gratuity. No one wants an unexpected invoice presented at the end of the event.