

SPRING 2023

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Show Issue 2023!

Art of Catering Food Returns! {30}

Orlando: The Tastiest Place on Earth {34}

On the Menu with Chef Yia Vang {44}

Your 2023 Michael Roman Lifetime Achievement recipient {96}

EDUCATION, NEWS, PRODUCTS & IDEAS FOR PROFESSIONAL CATERERS

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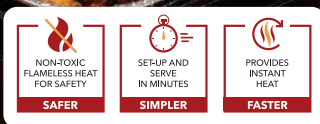


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contents

SPRING 2023
VOLUME 21, NUMBER 1



COVER
STORY

52

features

- 52... ANNOUNCING THE FLORIDA SUNSHINE TOUR**
Catersource + The Special Event is headed to Orlando March 27-30!
- 30... THE ART OF CATERING FOOD RETURNS!**
After a three-year hiatus the Art of Catering Food, a conference for chefs by chefs, will make its return to Orlando March 26-27, just in advance of this year's main event
- 34... ORLANDO: THE TASTIEST PLACE ON EARTH**
We take a look at why Orlando has grown to become the #2 Best Foodie City in America, according to WalletHub
- 96... WHAT WOULD WARREN DO?**
Puff 'n Stuff Catering's Warren Dietel is this year's recipient of the Michael Roman Lifetime Achievement award



Behind the Cover

The Four Flamingos: A Richard Blais Florida Kitchen is one of Orlando's hottest new restaurants. It combines the memory of vintage eras with the bounty of Florida to create a treasure-packed menu of the fresh-caught surf and fire-grilled turf variety. Shown: a plated whole snapper. Turn to page 34 for more on Orlando's growing food scene
Photo courtesy Four Flamingos

departments

- 04... FOREWORD**
Our happy place
- 08... EVENT SOLUTIONS**
A prehistoric feast for the senses
- 14... THE C-SUITE**
Developing your people
- 16... FROM THE CONSULTANTS**
Catering to the meatless market
- 20... IN THE GLASS**
The art of the martini
- 44... ON THE MENU**
AOCF keynote speaker Chef Yia Vang embraces the space where Minnesota meets Hmong
- 76... CHEF'S CORNER**
Are you up for the challenge?
- 80... CATERING TO DIVERSITY**
What to know when catering a South Asian wedding
- 92... ICA'S THE DISH**
What you'll experience at Art of Catering Food 2023
- 106... SUCCESSFUL SELLING**
Employee motivation strategies for managers
- 108... AS SEEN IN...**
Cincinatti during the Leading Caterers of America Executive Summit
- 112... STEAL THIS**
Serving vessels that surprise
- 116... THE DIGESTIF**
Chef Jay Varga hopes to see you during Art of Catering Food



Our Happy Place

My Delta flight app tells me that I have less than a month until my flight check-in for Orlando. Granted, I fly in days before you all will. You know why: stages don't build themselves, food and beverage need prep time, flowers must be processed, and AV needs setting up. If there is one factor that we all know, it is that behind-the-

scenes work is crucial. There are boots on the ground long before the first attendee badge prints.

It has been nearly a year of planning for a show-stopping Catersource + The Special Event for the best-of-the-best in the events and catering spaces—you! As you step into the Orange County Convention Center, onto our exhibit hall floor, into education classrooms, and venture out to event venues for this year's 'Florida Sunshine Tour', you'll be delighted to experience:

- **Enjoy our new “Event Escape” rooms.** Watch florists in action, relax with a yoga session, pop a flower into your lapel, or take a Texas-sized selfie with colleagues.
- **Tablescapes!** They're back after quite the hiatus, and you can participate in their design on our exhibit hall floor—or watch them unfold and take all the inspiration back home for your next event.
- **Celebrations:** Awards are back and bigger than ever, because it is about time to celebrate our industry again! Let's behold the beauty of our collective work and celebrate at the ACE (see page 70 for this year's nominees), Gala, and CATIE awards, as well as applaud our Lifetime Achievement recipients (turn to page 96 for more on this year's Michael Roman Lifetime Achievement award recipient) for their incredible contributions. It's going to be a great big glitter bomb of a night.
- **Networking:** Industry associations are collaborating with the show so fervently, we could call this an “industry week!” You won't find any other event with such a robust and eclectic professional mix. From the International Caterers Association (ICA) to International Live Events Association (ILEA) to Academic Event Planners (AEP) and more, you'll meet allies, learn about ways you can give back to your industry, and make your best new connection ever.

If you want to read more about what awaits you in Orlando, this digital magazine is a love letter to not just the show, but the food, the people, and the experiences that await. From Amber Kispert's delicious dive into the Orlando food scene (turn to page 34) to an interview with Florida chef (and our closing keynote) Art Smith (turn to page 55), we have you covered!

Surprise and delightful experiences await you in Orlando. Accredited education and enhanced knowledge do too. Remarkable business building products and services, and memorable takeaways—all under one roof. These are yours next month. Will I see you there?

Kathleen Stoeher, Director of Community & Content Strategy

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Spring 2023 CONTRIBUTORS



Executive **Anthony Lambatos** (who'll be speaking at CS+TSE) discusses the importance of developing your people



Catering consultant **John Lombardo** sheds some light on the meat-less market



Sales expert **Meryl Snow** shares her employee motivation strategies for managers ahead of her appearance at CS+TSE



Kitchen guru **Robin Selden** challenges her chefs to be the best



Chef Jay Varga wants to see you (and educate you) at Art of Catering Food

What do you think of this issue? Like it? Love it? Have something to contribute to our website? We'd love to hear from you. Write us at editor@catersource.com.

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Hassle-free event staffing and scheduling

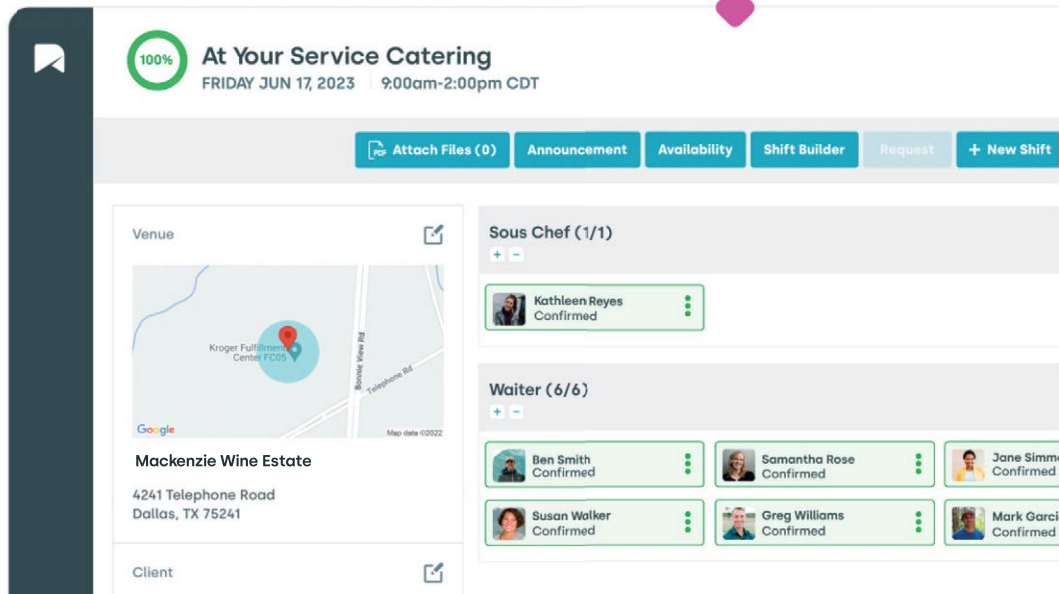
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The screenshot shows the Nowsta app interface for a catering business named 'At Your Service Catering'. The top bar indicates the date 'FRIDAY JUN 17, 2023' and the time '9:00am-2:00pm CDT'. Below this, there are buttons for 'Attach Files (0)', 'Announcement', 'Availability', 'Shift Builder', 'Request', and '+ New Shift'. The main content area is divided into two sections: 'Venue' and 'Staff'. The 'Venue' section shows a map of 'Mackenzie Wine Estate' at '4241 Telephone Road, Dallas, TX 75241'. The 'Staff' section lists employees under different roles: 'Sous Chef (1/1)' with Kathleen Reyes (Confirmed) and 'Waiter (6/6)' with Ben Smith, Samantha Rose, Jane Simm, Susan Walker, Greg Williams, and Mark Garcia, all confirmed.

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EVENT SOLUTIONS

By Amber Kispert

Deviled quail eggs (pickled beets, dill, and root chip).

The florals for the event (provided by Vivian's Petals) used exotic, jungle-inspired ferns and anthuriums.

A prehistoric-looking Hanging Tomahawk Steak.

A Prehistoric Feast for

Constellation Culinary Group delivers science-inspired menu for the Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science's fall fundraiser

All photos courtesy Lazaro Llanes

Immersive has already become the word of the year for 2023 among catering and event planners, as evidenced through [recent events](#) around the world. But not to be outdone, immersive (or experiential) dining is also growing in popularity.

One example of experiential dining is multisensory dining. While taste may be the most important sense for enjoying dinner, other senses (sight, smell, hearing/sound, and touch) can be nearly as important.

According to SupHer, immersive experiences are an escape from instability. One experiment was to create amped auditory experiences. This past fall was a truly immersive



The Green Herbivorous Salad featured a combination of asparagus, fava beans, peas, almonds, frisée lettuce, mint, avocado, basil, and crema.



The evening's entrée (the Mesozoic Forest) featured a braised short rib, fennel dusted shrimp, parsnip puree, oyster and morel mushrooms with Thumbelina carrots, crispy fingerling potatoes, crispy spring roll shell, fried parsley, and oregano.

the Senses

the 2023 Food and Beverage Report
b Farms, "high-impact sensory
n foods and beverages offers consumers
om ongoing chaos, uncertainty and
perators and manufacturers will
with ingredients and preparations that
l-up textural, visual, olfactory and
periences."

, Constellation Culinary Group provided
rsive dining experience to guests of the



**Theming the food during events
helps create an immersive
experience for our guests"**

— Caroline Morin, Director of Sales for Constellation Culinary Group



Green moss, “fossils,” “bones,” and other creative accents helped to mimic the habitats the dinosaurs lived in.

Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science during a 200-person fundraiser. For the event, *An Evening of Discovery: Digging Deep into Paleontology*, Constellation Culinary Group curated unique plates inspired by the museum’s special exhibition, *Ultimate Dinosaurs: Meet a New Breed of Beast*.

“Our chef and culinary team did a lot of research on the exhibition and the dinosaurs which are featured in it,” says Caroline Morin, Director of Catering Sales for Constellation. “We incorporated different aspects of the exhibition in the design and food for the event to create a truly extraordinary experience.”

A multisensory dining experience

The fundraiser was held in support of educational exhibitions and programs at Frost Science. The evening began with an intimate reception in the museum’s Main Atrium with Herbivore (vegetarian) and Carnivore (pork loin, salmon, and tomahawk steak) grazing stations decorated with wooden crates, palm leaves, concrete bowls, moss, leafy greens, and assembled vegetables in and around the station to create a dinosaur-inspired habitat.

Additionally, Frost Science worked with the Frost School of Music for cocktail hour entertainment.

A student group performed jazz classics and a unique spin on dinosaur-inspired songs, including the themes from *The Flintstones* and *Jurassic Park*.

Following the reception, guests moved to the Frost Planetarium for a presentation from the Frost Science President and CEO. After the presentation, a select number of patrons joined the museum’s Board of Trustees for a one-of-a-kind sit-down dining experience prepared by Constellation underneath the iconic and picturesque Gulf Stream Aquarium exhibit, Oculus.

“The biggest challenge was creating a menu that was unique and



Orange glazed pork belly (pineapple mostarda and crispy tostones).



The event featured a number of Mediterranean-inspired dips, including cucumber tzatziki, edamame hummus, baba ghanoush, red beet hummus, and green goddess.



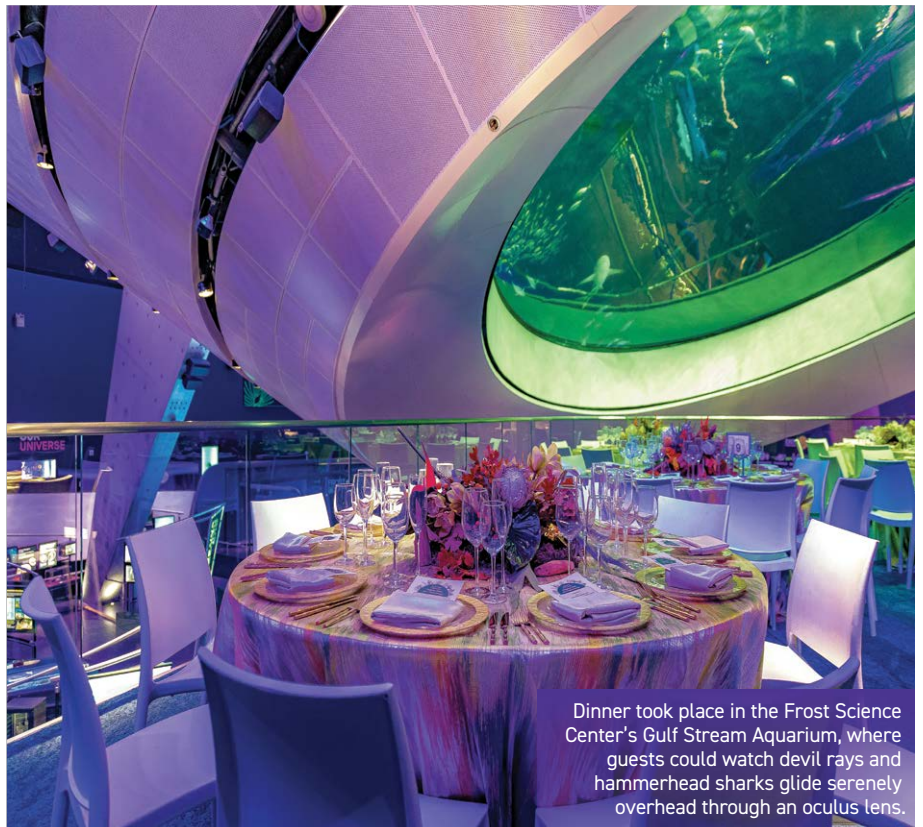
Playing off the dinosaur theme, each food station was aptly named: Carnivore or Herbivore.



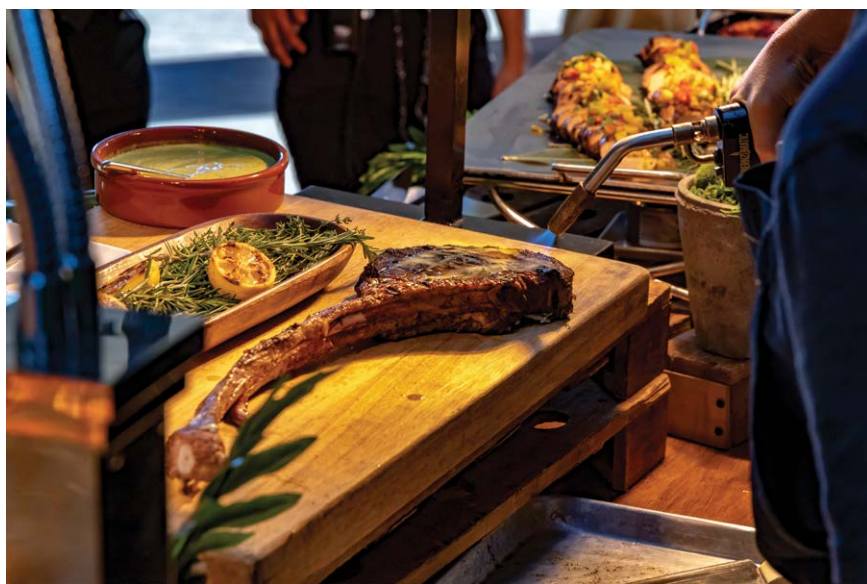
Roasted Israeli couscous.



Jerk-rubbed pork loin with mango salsa.



Dinner took place in the Frost Science Center's Gulf Stream Aquarium, where guests could watch devil rays and hammerhead sharks glide serenely overhead through an oculus lens.



EAT LIKE A CAVEMAN

Attending the science center's event isn't the only way to experience a dinosaur-inspired menu. The paleo diet is an eating plan based on foods humans might have eaten during the Paleolithic Era (roughly 10,000 to 2.5 million years ago).

A modern paleo diet includes fruits, vegetables, lean meats, fish, eggs, nuts and seeds. These are foods that in the past people could get by hunting and gathering. Other names for a paleo diet include Paleolithic diet, Stone Age diet, hunter-gatherer diet, and caveman diet.

The paleo diet is based on the idea that our genes are not well adjusted for modern diets that grew out of farming.

WHAT TO EAT

FRUITS
VEGETABLES
NUTS AND SEEDS
EGGS

LEAN MEATS, especially grass-fed animals or wild game

FISH, especially those rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, mackerel and albacore tuna

OILS FROM FRUITS AND NUTS, such as olive oil or walnut oil

WHAT TO AVOID

GRAINS, such as wheat, oats, and barley

LEGUMES, such as beans, lentils, and peanuts

DAIRY PRODUCTS, such as milk and cheese

Refined and added SUGAR

Added SALT
STARCHY VEGETABLES, such as corn, jicama, peas, and white potatoes

Highly processed foods, such as **CHIPS OR COOKIES**

Information courtesy the Mayo Clinic

creative, while also being inspired by dinosaurs and paleontology,” says Morin. “Looking up dinosaur words and terminology for the food and cocktails was also a challenge, although a fun one.”

The three-course menu featured a Green Herbivorous Salad (asparagus, fava beans, peas, almonds, frisée lettuce, mint, avocado, basil, and crema); the Mesozoic Forest (braised short rib, fennel dusted shrimp, parsnip puree, oyster and morel mushrooms with Thumbelina carrots, crispy fingerling potatoes, crispy spring roll shell, fried parsley, and oregano); and the Fossil Discovery,



The event's dessert (Fossil Discovery) was an interactive dessert of chocolate “fossils” and edible rocks nestled underneath crushed up Oreo cookies where guests took a fossil brush and a tiny spoon in the shape of a shovel that they used to brush off the “dirt” and find the hidden fossil, just like paleontologists do.

an interactive dessert of chocolate “fossils” and edible rocks nestled underneath crushed up Oreo cookies where guests took a fossil brush and a tiny spoon in the shape of a shovel that they used to brush off the “dirt” and find the hidden fossil.

“Theming the food during events helps create an immersive experience for our guests,” says Morin.

“Integrating the theme into all aspects of an event, including décor, entertainment, and of course food, elevates the overall impression your guests will have and creates a memorable affair.” **CS**



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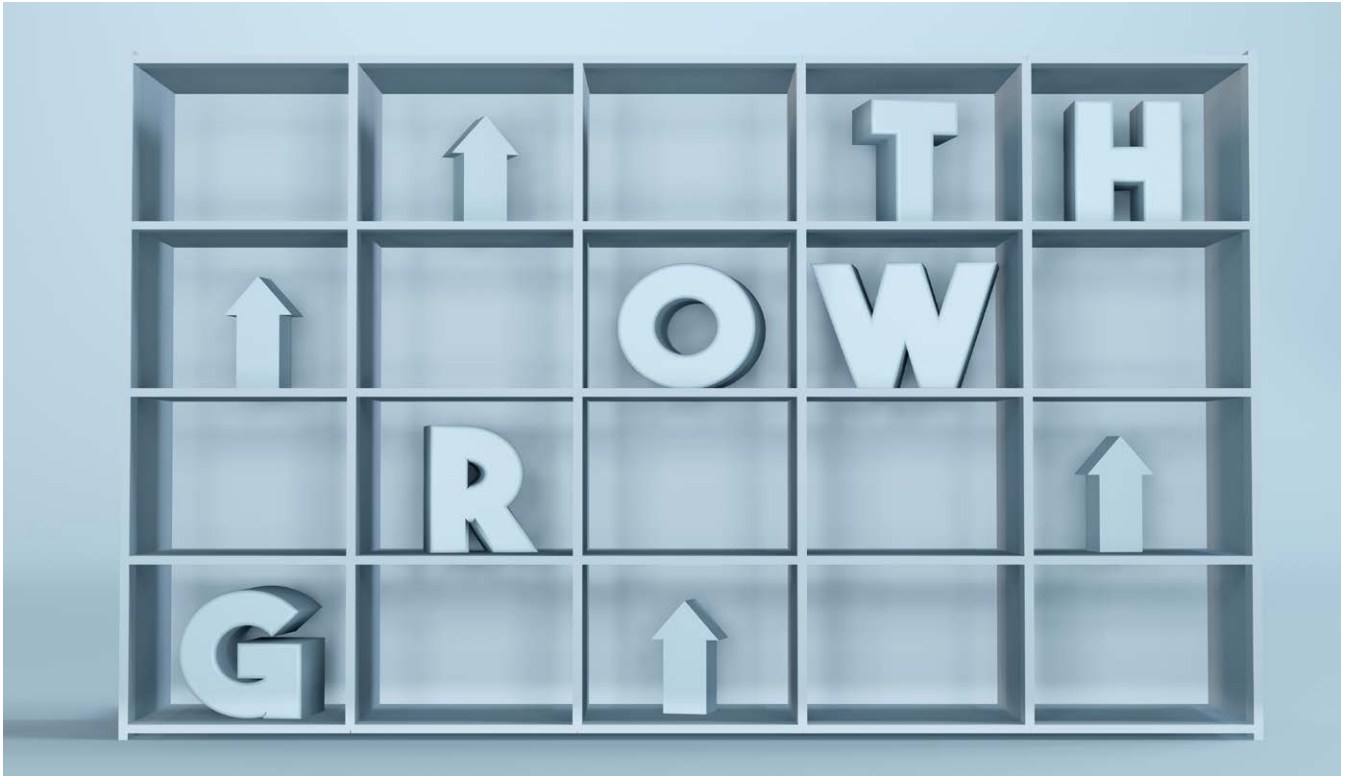


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Developing Your People

Many businesses understand that people are their most important asset and will profess that they value them as such. Yet, there continues to be a large portion of the employee pool that does not feel valued and is either passively disengaged or actively disengaged.

One of the most significant areas that leaders can focus on to improve engagement is the development and growth of their team members. This is especially important for the newest members of the workforce. According to a study by LinkedIn, they found that Generation Z is highly motivated to advance their career through learning and upskilling, with 83% saying that they want to learn new skills in order to perform better at their job.

If you're looking to re-evaluate how you develop your team members, here are a few things to consider.

Feedback

Investing in the growth of others takes time, which is our most precious resource. It's easy to get caught on the

hamster wheel of busyness or succumb to the constant demands of the urgent. Developing people requires time set aside that may not necessarily have an immediate impact, but over time will make a huge difference.

Examples include:

- Time spent in one-to-one meetings learning about the needs, goals, and dreams of individual team members.
- Time spent getting to know employees as people—what motivates them, what they like to do outside of work, and what is important to them in life.
- Time spent sharing feedback about how they are performing.

I think annual reviews are a thing of the past and that a minimum of one hour each month should be spent with each of your direct reports. People generally want to do a good job at work, and they crave feedback on how they are doing, yet there seems to be a disconnect. Office Vibe conducted a survey in which they found 58% of managers think they give enough feedback, yet 65% of employees said they wanted more feedback. The more time we spend with our people, the more opportunities we have to help them grow.

Let go in order to let them grow

I recently had a discussion with fellow owners about empowering others, and how difficult it can be to “let go” of certain responsibilities. When we are accustomed to doing a job (and usually doing it really well) it’s hard to watch someone else do it and not immediately perform to the level we personally were operating at. Ultimately, the consensus was that we must find ways to stomach the proverbial step back for the people around us to make giant strides forward.

One person summed it up perfectly: “I am learning to let go, which is really learning to let-grow! I’m finally beginning to allow others to contribute, and not being surprised, disappointed, or discouraged of failure in their pursuit of success. People will not learn if never given the opportunity. I’m beginning to teach, suggest, and advise, rather than do, do, do.”

Discovery and flexibility

Helping employees better understand who they are is one of the best ways to develop them as leaders within your organization. When people clearly understand their strengths, behavioral tendencies, and root of their interests, they have more confidence and satisfaction and can perform their jobs at a higher level.

At Footers Catering we utilize a variety of assessments like The PXT Profile, Enneagram, Via Institute, The Innovation Quotient Edge, and Strength Finder to help our team members learn more about themselves and make sure they are in alignment with their respective positions.

This is also very helpful when there is an employee who is a good cultural fit but struggling

with work. Oftentimes this shows up as someone who is really good at part of their job, but struggling with another aspect of their responsibilities. If you are willing to be flexible with your job descriptions, then you can tailor positions to fit the strengths of your team as opposed to forcing people to continue doing tasks that don’t align with their natural skill set.

Note: I will be doing a deep dive into this specific challenge in my “[Right Person, Wrong Position](#)” class during Catersource + The Special Event.

Education

Some organizations don’t necessarily have the people or resources to do their own educational programs. It’s important to remember that not all development needs to be done in-house. There are many ways to provide educational experiences for your team members.

Online platforms like TED Talks, Master Class, and LinkedIn Learning are great ways to share knowledge with your team throughout the year. The opportunity to attend an industry conference like Catersource + The Special Event is a tremendous way to show a team member that you value them. They gain a better understanding of the industry, have access to some fantastic speaker insights, and connect with peers from across the country.

One of the best investments we can make is in the people on our teams. Focusing on their growth and development will reduce turnover and increase productivity and engagement among the team. Organizations that have a reputation for developing their people also develop long-term goodwill and are more attractive for top talent looking to make a career move. 

See Anthony Lambatos LIVE!

You can see [Anthony Lambatos](#) live and in-person at Catersource + The Special Event, March 27–30 in Orlando, FL during the following sessions:

[Right Person, Wrong Position: Putting People in the Right Seats on the Bus](#), Tuesday, March 28th at 10:00 a.m.

[A Candid Conversation LIVE with Footers Catering](#), Tuesday, March 28th at 4:00 p.m.

[State of the Industry - Workplace Culture](#), Wednesday, March 29th at 1:00 p.m.

Visit <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent> for all the details



Anthony Lambatos grew up in the catering business working for his father and founder of [Footers Catering](#) in Denver, Colorado. Anthony and his wife, April, purchased the business in 2010 and have successfully made the transition to a second-generation family business. They recently moved Footers Catering into a new facility that will also house their newest venture—an event center called [Social Capitol](#). Anthony is passionate about helping other companies create great places to work and inspiring people with heart leadership and does that through his sister company [MIBE](#). (acronym for make it better everyday).



Last fall I attended a two-day expo at the Javits Center sponsored by the Plant Based Food Association called *Discover the Future of Plant-Based*. 200 plus exhibitors were on the floor ranging from suppliers and marketing firms to providers of extremely technical equipment that process the foods. Additionally, there were also about 50 speakers and demos covering dozens of educational/informational sessions.

went from 80% meat/20% vegetarian to roughly 40/60—we have not had real milk or butter in our refrigerator for years and I did experience some improved health results.

To identify how meatless choices influence the catering business, it's time to look toward an understanding of what is on the mind of the public who book and attend your events.

A logical guidepost to defining the market is to quantify practicing vegetarians and vegans; depending on the source, it is estimated that about 1.5% to 5% of the US population fits into these two categories.

Issues of climate change, water conservation, and ethical treatment of animals have been the catalyst for drawing more attention to meatless diets as a possible solution to these crises. There is also increasing awareness by an educated public; for example, of understanding the full effects of animal farming, such as the amount of nitrogen-based fertilizer that is added to the soil, and the effect it has on greenhouse gas emissions.

The growing prevalence of plant-based diets is evidenced through



John Lombardo, CHA is a senior consultant with Certified Catering Consultants and is a veteran hospitality industry executive. His successful career includes managing privately-owned businesses and four- and five-star level corporate hotel properties. A combination of practical skills honed by opening and turning around properties ranging from locations in Maui, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and elsewhere across the continental U.S., combined with a degree from Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration

provide John with a unique ability to understand many facets of hospitality. His additional experience owning several hospitality businesses complements his overall understanding of how to address the challenges that owners and managers face today. John can also communicate effectively to Spanish-speaking staff.

“Issues of climate change, water conservation, and ethical treatment of animals have been the catalyst for drawing more attention to meatless diets as a possible solution to these crises.

the growing number of “fast food” style restaurants who are now adopting some form of meatless menu. Additionally, several high-end restaurants are also getting in on the trend. For example, New York City restaurateur Jean-George Vongerichten’s newest venture, abcV, states that it aims “to serve, inform, and inspire a cultural shift towards plant-based intelligence, through creativity and deliciousness. Offering high vibration foods, embracing balance with beauty, wellness, wisdom, and love to nurture our personal and planetary ecosystems.” Vongerichten has also opened Seeds & Weeds at the Tin Building in New York City, focusing solely on plant-based and vegan dishes.



The Generation Z, Millennial, and ethos effect

The most stimulating presentation I heard at the expo was from author Eve Turow-Paul, a recognized leading expert on Millennial and Generation Z global food culture, and founder and Executive Director of Food for Climate League. I read her book “Hungry” which reveals behaviors backed by detailed research on the sociological and psychological drivers behind how and why some of the food patterns that exist today have developed.

“The global eco-wakening is driving a greener future with over 87% of Americans seeking more sustainable hotels and travel,” said Alan E. Young, Co-Founder and President of Puzzle Partner, for Hotel-online.com, and this trend is conceptually in concert with the minds choosing a meatless menu.

In addition to generational philosophies, another factor, which I feel is a major driver, is the philosophy on health and well-being related to plant-based diets; and this doesn’t even consider the idea that many meatless foods avoid the barriers of gluten-free, most allergy sensitivities, and in many cases are non-GMO. You would be hard-pressed to find a doctor or dietician who did not agree that well-planned diets along these lines protect against obesity, metabolic syndrome, and cardiovascular disease.

Even the Mayor of New York City, Eric Adams, practices plant-based foods. He ran on a platform that

A Plant-Based Guide for Caterers

- 1. Talk to your suppliers** and get a consolidated listing of vegan, vegetarian, and plant-based products.
- 2. Buy smaller shelf-stable packages of food** to use as enhancing ingredients.
- 3. Research recipes from reputable sources** and test them out. If you don’t like them, chances are your guests won’t either.
- 4. Use ingredients associated with the meat option** to create an associative link in the consumer’s taste buds. Examples can include barbecue sauce, curry, molé, Asian-inspired marinades and dressings, or fruit coulis for desserts.
- 5. What items do you already serve** that can easily be adapted or already fall into the market definition?
- 6. Go out and experience restaurants that specialize in this market** and see what items were impressive.
- 7. Look at menus and reviews online** and see what items are popular that you can make in your own style.
- 8. Identify options** on your menus in very clear terms.
- 9. Develop attractive labeling methods** for items on buffets and utilize expressive icons for identification.

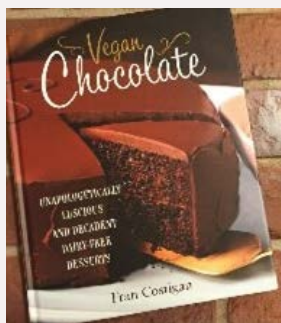
Vegetarian, Vegan, Plant-Based... A Matter of Definition

Understanding the difference between vegetarian, vegan, and plant-based could put one into a Google tailspin. Here is a summary that reflects what most would agree upon, and that freestanding caterers and catering departments should understand:



Plant-based

The Plant Based Foods Association (plantbasedfoods.org) defines plant-based as **“Foods made from plants that contain no animal derived ingredients.”**



Vegan

Being vegan is as much about lifestyle choices as it is about what you eat. **Vegans consume no food that comes from animals (such**

as meat, eggs, or dairy products), and who also abstain from using animal products such as leather, fur, or even wool. They also avoid animal ingredients in cosmetics (such as dyes made from insects), perfumes with components from animal scent glands, and other items. Vegans also often reject products that have been tested on animals. However, not all people who call themselves vegans strictly adhere to all these restrictions.

There are some foods that are considered non-vegan even though they are not meat or dairy. Honey is typically considered non-vegan because it's a product of honeybees. Some products are considered non-vegan, not because they contain animal products, but because they're processed with them. For example, some sugars are considered non-vegan due to being processed using a product from animal bones.



Vegetarian

A vegetarian diet is often primarily plant-based. The main difference is that vegetarians eat non-meat animal products, especially dairy products and eggs, which are often used as primary protein sources. Some foods sometimes considered non-vegetarian are not obvious. For example, cottage or parmesan

cheese is produced using animal tissue known as rennet; some beers include a fish-derived gelatin known as isinglass (also used in the clear window openings you see in tent sides). Many desserts, candies, and even Jell-O® use gelatin whose natural form is animal tissue in the form of a protein extracted from the skins and bones of certain animals. After the gelatin in the flavored powder is dissolved in boiling water and then cooled it forms the gelatinous, semi-solid jiggly substance many of us know from our youth. Still, not every vegetarian avoids all these products.



Vegetarian derivations

- **Pescatarian:** Eats a mostly vegetarian diet, but also eats fish and seafood as well.
- **Flexitarian:** Largely plant-based, but occasionally eats meat, fish, and poultry.
- **Lacto-ovo vegetarian:** Avoids meat, poultry, and fish but makes allowances for eggs and dairy products.
- **Lacto vegetarians:** Eat a plant-based diet and dairy products, but avoid meat, seafood, and eggs.
- **Ovo vegetarians:** Avoids meat, seafood, or dairy products, they do eat eggs and products that contain eggs.



included focusing on improving preventative care, teaching healthy habits, and making school lunches healthier. “I’m going to be a broccoli mayor,” said Adams, who went vegan after being diagnosed with diabetes. Adams also helped with the implementation of Meatless Monday, which provides 1.1 million students with healthy, all-vegetarian breakfast and lunch menus. Adams is further advocating for its adoption in public schools, prisons, government buildings, and hospitals. Despite the positives, there is some dissention, however, over the positive effects of meatless foods, citing lack of certain vitamins like B-12, adequate protein, high calorie content (like many cauliflower crust pizzas), and the effect of processing methods themselves; for example, coconut oil is used to create sizzle in many foods but is very high in saturated fats.

It tastes just like...

While sampling dozens of foods at the expo, the phrase “It tastes just like...” was repeated by vendors on countless occasions. Converting

someone completely from meat-eater to meatless is difficult at best, but there can be ground gained in a selective and gradual approach, and that is where I feel catering is best served.

When the Impossible and Beyond Burgers made their debut several years ago, I set up a tasting, inviting an all-male group to sample some hamburgers the chef had prepared; however, the participants were told they would be testing out a new hamburger bun. Not a single person in the group detected, or made any negative comments about, the fact that there wasn’t any meat in the burger itself. In fact, they were quite surprised when they found out.

When talking about meatless alternatives, some of the current challenges include:

- **Price.** Many of the products are expensive and are packed for the home consumer market. Major vendors like Sysco and US Foods are increasing the number of products they carry, and in some cases categorizing them for easy reference.

- **Popularity of meat and traditional dairy foods.** Let’s face it, we are by and large a meat-eating country and there are many societal, cultural, and taste habits that sustain this.
- **The texture/taste Issue.** As mentioned above, this is a hurdle. Some of the items I sampled were very good, a ‘smoked salmon’ that I could not tell had no seafood whatsoever in it, and a ‘bacon’ that sizzled, smelled and was very close in taste to real bacon. There were however many items that were sub-par in both taste and mouth-feel—the texture of meat just has a singular quality that is very difficult to replicate.

The world of plant-based foods is constantly evolving, so it’s in every caterer’s best interest to stay abreast of this growing market. **CS**

Catering Consultants In-Person

Need a quick consultation about some aspect of your business? The Certified Catering Consultants (CCC) will offer free half-hour appointments on site during Catersource + The Special Event (March 27–30 in Orlando) to address your catering-related challenges, identify your highest value opportunities, and/or help you improve your business and ROI. The CCC team has been consulting with caterers for over 20 years and many of them ran businesses of their own—or still do! Head to room W233 during show hours, or complete the [appointment form](#) here, to sign up for a free consultation.

IN THE GLASS

By Amber Kispert

The Art of the Martini

From the classics
to the imposters





Shaken. Stirred. Wet. Dry. Dirty. Vodka. Gin.

When it comes to martinis, there's a lot of different choices to make, and a lot of differing opinions on what makes a good one.

"I think one of the reasons that people are sort of intimidated by the drink is that it comes with this folklore, this mysticism, that it's this iconic drink you can't mess with," says Claire Smith-Warner, head of spirit creation and mixology at Belvedere Vodka in an article for [Tales of the Cocktail](#). "But all of these different possible ways that you can enjoy it makes this drink

one of the most personable drinks that there is."

No matter which camp you fall into though (traditionalist versus those who like to experiment), martinis have continued to stand the test of time (thanks in no small part to James Bond).

"If you know how to make a martini, everything else will be fantastic," said Nicola Olianias (Fratelli Branca Distillery Global Ambassador) during [Tales of the Cocktail 2022 \(TOTC\)](#) during a session on vermouth. "A martini is almost an entry level for everything else."

CLASSIC DRY MARTINI

Recipe courtesy the [Star Tribune](#)

YIELD: 1

INGREDIENTS

4 T (2 oz) dry gin
2 T (1 oz) dry vermouth
1 dash Orange Bitters, optional
Olives or lemon peel for garnish

METHOD

Combine ingredients in a mixing glass filled with ice and stir vigorously until well-chilled. Taste frequently until mixture reaches desired flavor. If the alcohol is too assertive, let sit for 30 seconds to allow ice to dilute the mixture, and stir again. Strain into a chilled martini glass. Garnish with a skewer of olives or a lemon peel.



The cla

MARTINIS ARE ONE of the simplest cocktails to create, since they are essentially composed of only two ingredients (vermouth and a base spirit).

“They’re the star of a drink like this,” says Gui Jaroschy with Unfiltered Hospitality.

However, the fact that it’s so spirit-forward makes it surprisingly complicated to balance this delicate drink.

“When you taste a martini with all these different ratios, it’s clear that even the smallest amount of sugar in a dry vermouth, and the acidity and the texture that the dry vermouth provides to that drink is the difference between a well-balanced cocktail and just a cold glass of gin,” said Matt Belanger (Death & Co) during TOTC 2022. “That ingredient is so important to making it taste like a cocktail, like something you want to drink. It gives structure on your palate.”

Additionally, the martini’s ingredients can be combined in so many different ways that no two martinis will ever be the same.

“It’s not a one size fits all,” said Kurt Rogers (Bodegas Lustau) during TOTC 2022.

Here are some of the most common styles of martini:

The dry martini

A dry martini is one that uses less vermouth as opposed to more.

The wet martini (or 50/50 Martini)

This version is a 50/50 ratio with equal parts of gin and vermouth.

“The 50/50 martini has gained prevalence today due to the evolution of the drink,” said Claire Sprock during TOTC 2022.

The dirty martini

This version includes olive brine for extra flavor.

While dry, dirty, or 50/50 may be the most “classic” martini, a few others are making a splash.



Classics

Martini

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Martini

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The Original Martini cocktail

Made with equal parts gin and vermouth with dashes of bitters, curacao, and syrup.

The Classic Martini

A 2:1 ratio of gin and dry vermouth with a couple dashes of bitters.

The Perfect Martini

Gin and equal parts sweet and dry vermouth.

The Reverse Martini

Where the amount of gin and vermouth are flipped.



How to Batch a Martini for a Crowd

If you're catering a party and want to serve martinis, it's highly suggested to pre-batch them rather than having a bartender create them one-by-one.

“Pre-batched freezer martinis are definitely coming into vogue at high-end restaurants and mixology bars,” says Gui Jaroschy with Unfiltered Hospitality.

For pre-batching, you'll need to scale the recipe by the number of serves, and then combine all the ingredients beforehand, adding water for dilution (approximately 15%), and then refrigerate at least six hours before the event.

This way, your cocktail is already mixed, chilled, and diluted, so all you need to do is pour it into your guests' glasses. It's that simple. Just be sure your ratio is consistent with that of the original cocktail recipe, and don't forget to dilute.

Information courtesy Chris Tunstall, A Bar Above

GIN ÉLEVÉ

Recipe and photo courtesy Chris Tunstall, A Bar Above

YIELD: 1

INGREDIENTS

2½ oz London Dry Gin
½ oz Dry Vermouth
¼ oz Lillet Blanc
2 drops of Cardamom Bitters
2 drops of Orange Bitters

METHOD

Combine all ingredients into a mixing glass. Add ice, and stir for about 15 seconds or until properly chilled. Strain into a coupe or Nick & Nora. Garnish with an expressed lemon peel.



Know Your Bitters

Once a staple in apothecaries and pharmacies, bitters have long been a fixture behind the bar. With a booming market for small-batch bitters, there is now a seemingly endless well of flavors from which to choose. Nowadays, bitters range in flavor from Aztec chocolate to crabapple and cardamom.

WHAT ARE BITTERS?

When discussing bitters, mixologists are most often referring to extracts—and they're not the same as tinctures.

"Tinctures are technically one singular ingredient that's extracted to create one flavor," said Lauren Mote, co-creator of Vancouver-based Bittered Sling, for an article with *Tales of the Cocktail*.

"Bitters are not a singular ingredient; they are a combination of ingredients that come together to add depth and complexity and to soften out the harsh edges of ingredients."

The main different kinds of bitters used in cocktails are:

Orange/citrus bitters

Orange bitters are made from peels of Seville oranges, cardamom, caraway seed, coriander, anise, and burnt sugar. This type of cocktail bitters gives off the traditional marmalade scent with hints of bitter and sweet taste from the orange peel and alcohol combination. Suggested cocktails: Martini and Negroni.

Aromatic bitters

Based on its name, aromatic bitters are made from botanical ingredients that are known to exude different smells when crushed or mixed. Examples of aromatics used are cinnamon, mint, peppermint, hibiscus, lavender, valerian, lemongrass, and sage. Suggested cocktail: Manhattan, Old Fashioned, or Sazerac.

Nut bitters

Nut bitters are relatively new to the market.

Continued on page 26

The imposters

ONE STYLE OF martini that has become very popular among consumers, but is oftentimes controversial among martini enthusiasts, bartenders, and mixologists, are the "dessert martinis," such as the Chocolate Martini, Espresso Martini, and Lemon Drop Martini to name just a few. These drinks are often considered "imposters" by martini purists.

"To be clear, these aren't actual martinis since they don't follow

the traditional style," says Chris Tunstall of *Barstend*. Above, "but the traditional martini glasses, they do have their place in the cocktail world."

In fact, according to a firm [CGA by Nielsen](#), Espresso Martini was the 10 most ordered cocktail at bars in the United States last year, bumping the traditional martini off the list.

"Consumers are drawn to the simplicity and d



posters

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cocktail,” said Lisa Hawkins,
senior vice president for public
affairs for the Distilled Spirits
Council in an article for [CNN
Business](#). “The elegance of the
Espresso Martini elevates your
cocktail experience at a bar or
restaurant, and it also serves
as an impressive after-dinner
cocktail when entertaining
guests at home.”



MARTINI PENACHO

Recipe courtesy Chris Tunstall, A Bar Above

YIELD: 1

INGREDIENTS

2 oz Old Tom Gin

½ oz Mezcal

¼ oz Green Chartreuse

¼ oz Suze

METHOD

Combine all ingredients into a mixing glass. Add ice, and stir for about 15 seconds or until properly chilled. Strain into a coupe or Nick & Nora glass. Garnish with a torched rosemary sprig—make sure it's still smokey when serving.



SLIP AWAY

Recipe and photo courtesy Gui Jaraschy, Unfiltered Hospitality

YIELD: 1

INGREDIENTS

1 ½ oz J. Reigers Midwestern Dry Gin

1 ½ oz Lo-fi Sweet Vermouth

½ oz Lo-fi Dry Vermouth

3 dash Monterey Bitters (equal parts Scrappy's Orange and Scrappy's Black Lemon Bitters)

Garnish: spirulina/lime oil and ornate lemon twist

METHOD

Pour ingredients into a mixing glass and stir until chilled. Place a large ice sphere into a chilled coupe and pour martini into glass. Express lemon twist over cocktail and place on rim. Gently drop 3 drops of spirulina/lime oil around ice sphere.



Know Your Bitters

Continued from page 24

But since mixologists and bartenders are quite experimental behind the bar, they came up with nut-flavored bitters that are made from coffee and chocolates.

Natural bitters

In the absence of preservatives and GMO, natural bitters exist. These are made from organic ingredients that are usually sourced in local farms.

Cocktail bitters

Bitters are commonly used to flavor cocktails. Because of their strong taste, they can balance out the sweet and sour notes of any beverage. Cocktail bitters are added in the form of drops or splashes in the drinks.

A few suggested pairings from Mote include:

- In general, **aromatic bitters** go well with oak-aged spirits
- **Citrus-based bitters** love white spirits and fresh ingredients like mint, basil, and cilantro
- **Rich chocolate bitters** play well with Cognac
- **Celery bitters** pair exceptionally well with sherry, sake, bourbon, and vermouth, and they do great things to a Rob Roy or Champs Elysees

Sources:

[Tales of the Cocktail](#)
[Advanced Mixology](#)



Stirre never

NOW, NO OFFENSE to James Bond, but mixologists around the country agree that the proper way to make a martini is stirred, never shaken.

“You’re looking to achieve both chill and a little bit of dilution,” according to an article on [Martha Stewart’s website](#). “Shaking it will agitate the liquids and leave shards of ice, ruining that pretty, clear-as-glass effect that the martini is famous for.”

“You’re looking for a nice balance of flavors between the spirit, vermouth, and possibly bitters,” says Jaroschy. “I want it nice and cold, but not over diluted.”

In fact, according to TOTC, when gin martinis are shaken (not stirred), the high velocities can have scientifically proven negative impacts.

“Any complex mixture of odors is generally divided into three parts: top note (in perfumes this is also known as the head note), middle note (heart note) and base note or fixative,” said Shannon Stewart, a research scientist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in the TOTC article.

“So, when you agitate by shaking it for too long, you’re causing the flavors to dissipate,” according to [TOTC](#). “Those botanicals that move forward to start to shine and become dull as a result: A cocktail that’s not as crisp as it should be.”

“This is what we’re talking about,” Stewart said. “If you shake it, the result only contains middle notes. Yuck.”

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Many martini enthusiasts also agree that temperature also plays a pivotal role; in fact, many suggest keeping your vodka, gin, and glasses in the freezer, while storing the vermouth in the refrigerator.

“That way you can chill the cocktail to perfect temperature without overdiluting,” Jaroschy says, “and the glass keeps the drink cold for the first crucial sips rather than warming it up.”

NAKED & DIRTY

Recipe and photo courtesy Gui Jaroschy, Unfiltered Hospitality

YIELD: 1

INGREDIENTS

2 oz Belvedere Smogory Forrest Vodka
.85 oz olive brine
.6 oz water
2 sprays pecorino cheese rind tincture in glass before pouring
Garnish: pimento olive on cocktail pick

METHOD

Batch all ingredients and rebottle. Store in the freezer at least six hours. At service, bring chilled glass with pimento olive and atomizer of pecorino spray. Spritz inside of glass twice at the table and pour ice cold martini to ¼ of rim.



ESPRESSO MARTINI

Recipe courtesy Absolut Vodka

YIELD: 1

INGREDIENTS

Ice Cubes
1 ⅓ oz vodka
⅔ oz Kahlúa
⅔ oz espresso
3 whole coffee beans

METHOD

Fill a cocktail shaker with ice cubes. Add 1 ⅓ Parts Vodka, ⅔ Part Kahlúa, and ⅔ Part Cooled Espresso. Shake well to get the foam on top, and strain it into a cocktail or martini glass. Garnish by placing three coffee beans on top.



REVIVER MARTINI

Recipe and photo courtesy Chris Tunstall, A Bar Above

YIELD: 1

INGREDIENTS

2 oz Japanese Gin
½ oz Lillet Blanc
¼ oz Cointreau
¼ oz Giffard Limoncello
2 dashes of orange bitters
⅛ oz Absinthe, for glass rinse

METHOD

Combine all ingredients, except absinthe, into a mixing glass. Add ice, and stir for about 15 seconds or until properly chilled. Rinse your coupe or Nick & Nora glass with the absinthe, and then strain the cocktail from the mixing glass into the cocktail glass. Garnish with an expressed orange peel.



Photos on opposite page
courtesy WASIO Photography

Mixins

WITH SO MANY different takes on a martini, the question becomes: what makes a good martini? And when does a martini stop being a martini?

“From my perspective, martinis must be spirit-forward, made with a neutral-ish base spirit, a fortified wine (e.g., vermouth, sherry, wine, sake, etc.), bitters or tinctures, and, in some cases, a hint of sweetness,” says Jack Sotti, head bartender at Sweeties at The Standard in London for an article with [Liquor.com](#). “A much more basic way of putting it: it must

look like a martini when
a martini when
For Jaroschy, the
of a martini is a
important.

"When I see a gel being poured in, it has a glistening, like appearance, getting a good color. 'That visual cue I'm getting a good one, some mouthfeel, residual sugars to flavor of the base than mask it.'"



Don't miss any of the cocktail-centric sessions during Catersource + The Special Event in Orlando, FL. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

ing it up

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you drink it.”
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So, will martinis continue their
auspicious career? All signs
point to ‘yes.’

“The reason why the martini
remains so relevant is that it is a
delicious sipper and a very
classy cocktail,” Tunstall says.
“Next to champagne, the
martini is a drink associated
with class and wealth—both
fictional and in reality—and
everyone wants to feel posh at
some point, even if for a
moment, even if for a single
drink.” **CS**



Mix it Up During Catersource + The Special Event

Though not necessarily martini-related, there is a stellar lineup of cocktail-centric sessions taking place during this year’s Catersource + The Special Event, being held March 27–30 in Orlando, FL.

- **Transform Your Cocktail Program** (Justin Pasha)
- **A Chef’s Approach to Mixology** (Ryan Manning)
- **Experiential Cocktails** (Justin Pasha and Pedro Belandria)
- **Cocktail Trends with Pasha & Jeff** (Justin Pasha and Jeffrey Selden)
- **“To Build a Bar” - Profitable Beverage Centers 101** (Dean Mistretta)

More information can be found at <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/>



THE ART OF CATERING FOOD RETURNS!

By Amber Kispert

**“It truly is an
unmatched culinary
experience.”**
— Chef Jay Varga



On this page: Small bites from previous Art of Catering Food events, sampled by



the **ART** of CATERING FOOD

Looking to enhance your culinary operations in 2023? Catersource, in collaboration with the International Caterers Association, is thrilled to announce the return of Art of Catering Food, taking place March 26–27 at the Orange County Convention Center just in advance of this year’s main event.

Focused through the lens of the catering chef, AOCF is a boutique event created by chefs for chefs bringing attendees a two-day intensive that focuses closely on catered events and the food and logistics it takes to make them so memorable. Turn to page 116 to hear Jay Varga’s (The JDK Group) take on why AOCF is so worthwhile.

All the hallmarks of AOCF are in place: the quick burst Round Robins that keep attendees moving and learning; the high energy Lunch & Learn that pairs culinary concepts with a solid learning experience plus networking; a captivating keynote (Turn to page 44 for a Q&A with 2023 James Beard-nominated Chef Yia Vang) that will open your minds to ideas you may never have considered for your own kitchens; and finally, a



y attendees. All photos courtesy Catersource and Art of Catering Food

step off property and into one of the most progressive catering operations in the Orlando area: Puff 'n Stuff Catering corporate headquarters and commissary.

A TASTY LUNCH & LEARN

Tacos have definitely evolved from a deep-fried hard corn shell filled with ground beef and shredded lettuce. Moderated by Roy Porter, join three skilled chefs as they broaden your approach to tortillas, fillings, and toppings! First, the tortilla: a canvas

gently holding your composition together—where flavors, fillings, and toppings converge. Next, pointers on different proteins; beef, chicken, fish, pork, vegetables, tofu, and more. Finally, explore options for unique fillers plus preparation and technique including several cultural influences from around the world which have propelled tacos to new levels and bragging rights!

Join Roy Porter and chefs from the International Caterers Association on March 26th from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. to learn about this tasty trend and enjoy lunch with your colleagues.

CHEF-DRIVEN SESSIONS

AOCF's chef-driven education program will focus on technique, problem solving, and unique ideas while helping attendees navigate new industry trends to make cuisine the main event of any occasion with such sessions as: *The New Risotto... Dry Pasta; Salads... Who Needs Lettuce?; Beyond Basic: Doughnuts = Dollars; and Zero Waste Prep: Designing a Menu to Maximize Time & Profit*. Note, AOCF sessions are developed to be shorter for the



Hands-on experiences and culinary demonstrations are the hallmark of Art of Catering Food.



Chef Sean Sherman (from 2022 Best New Restaurant Owamni) delivered a culinary demonstration during the 2019 conference.

somewhat shorter attention spans that some chefs seem to have. Most sessions average about 30 minutes.

ROUND ROBIN SESSIONS

But then there are the Round Robin sessions, a favorite at just 20 minutes in length. Four classes will be held simultaneously and run four times, offering attendees a chance to get up and stretch and move from room to room as they learn. Best of all: a sample will be offered in each room, so that as chefs present their concepts, attendees can taste the result.

TOUR A CATERING KITCHEN

Puff 'n Stuff Catering, an award-winning Orlando member of the Leading Caterers of America, will open its facility to attendees of AOCF. Explore and learn from

the Puff team: efficiencies, cuisine, storage, and more. Surprises are in store; transportation to-and-from is provided. This is a terrific opportunity to look at how a premier catering operation runs.

WEAR IT WITH PRIDE

Attendees are encouraged to wear their chef coats: networking opportunities abound between sessions, during breaks, at the Sunday afternoon happy hour, and on the bus to the Puff 'n Stuff facility—so wear your chef coat if you wish and show solidarity for your profession! 



Beautifully plated samples await attendees of Art of Catering Food. Watch chefs onstage; taste what they are making moments later.

Registration is open & waiting for you!

Quick! Head over to <https://informaconnect.com/art-of-catering-food/> and get your ticket to Art of Catering Food. Hotel and travel information can also be found via the navigation bar at the top of the screen.

A photograph of a modern restaurant interior. The ceiling is dominated by a large, vibrant red, ruffled fabric sculpture that resembles a giant flower or a cloud. Below, several tables are set with white linens, glassware, and plates. Patrons are seated at these tables, some looking towards the camera. In the background, a dark wood-paneled wall and a brightly lit kitchen area with a chef are visible. The overall atmosphere is sophisticated and contemporary.

Orlando

The
Tastiest
Place on
Earth



Capa's open kitchen and wood-burning grill allows guests to get close to the action. Photo courtesy Four Seasons

Orlando has grown to become the **Number 2 Best Foodie City in America**, according to WalletHub

By Amber Kispert

Orlando is a lot more than just **Mickey Mouse**. Over the past several years, Orlando has become a mecca of great food. With James Beard winning chefs, Michelin Starred restaurants, and a constantly growing food scene, Orlando is quickly becoming one of the nation's top food destinations.

"Local chefs here have had to work hard to change the perspective on food in Orlando over the past decade," says Chef Shelby Farrell, chef de cuisine for Four Flamingos: A Richard Blais Florida Kitchen. "Those efforts have resulted in what I think is one of the tastiest and most diverse, but often most overlooked, local food scenes in the country."

So, let's take a look at what makes Orlando one of the tastiest places on earth.



Four Flamingos' Ice Cold
Oysters & Pearls with
pineapple & ahi Amarillo.
Photo courtesy Four
Flamingos

**“We have changed from the land of blasé
national chains to a city full of incredible local
restaurants and unique dining experiences.”**

– Chef Shelby Farrell - Four Flamingos: A Richard Blais Florida Kitchen

A true food city

In years past, Orlando was rich in national food chains, everything from fast food eateries to sit-down chains. However, those chains are now facing steep competition from Orlando's exploding food scene. In fact, WalletHub named Orlando as its Number 2 Foodie City in its [2022's Best Foodie Cities in America](#) report.

"We have changed from the land of blasé national chains to a city full of incredible local restaurants and unique dining experiences," Farrell says. "The change has challenged all restaurants in the city to step up their game and in turn is making Orlando a true foodie destination."

For its report, WalletHub compared more than 180 of the largest U.S. cities across 29 key metrics. The data set ranges from affordability and accessibility of high-quality restaurants to food festivals per capita to craft breweries and wineries per capita.

According to the report, some of the factors that make Orlando a top food city include:

- ◆ Orlando has the most gourmet specialty-food stores (per square foot of population), 0.4497, which is 19.1 times more than in Pearl

City, Hawaii, the city with the fewest at 0.0235.

- ◆ Orlando has the most restaurants (per square foot of population), 7.2815, which is 18 times more than in Pearl City, Hawaii, the city with the fewest at 0.4047.
- ◆ Cape Coral, Florida, has the highest ratio of full-service restaurants to fast-food establishments, 1.62, which is 2.9 times higher than in Jackson, Mississippi, the city with the lowest at 0.55.
- ◆ Orlando, Florida, has the most ice cream and frozen yogurt shops (per square foot of population) at 0.3504, which is 48.7 times more than in South Burlington, Vermont, the city with the fewest at 0.0072.

"It is an exciting time for food," says Chef James Katurakes (or Chef K), executive chef for Sodexo Live! at the Orange County Convention Center (where Catersource + The Special Event will be held). "The food industry itself has shifted and grown over the years and Orlando's food scene has immersed itself with its growing community. As the community grows and diversifies, so does the food. You can find almost any type of food here, which makes it one of the best places to visit, live, and especially, eat!"

"Orlando's food scene has grown up," says Vanessa Kells, director of event planning for Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort.

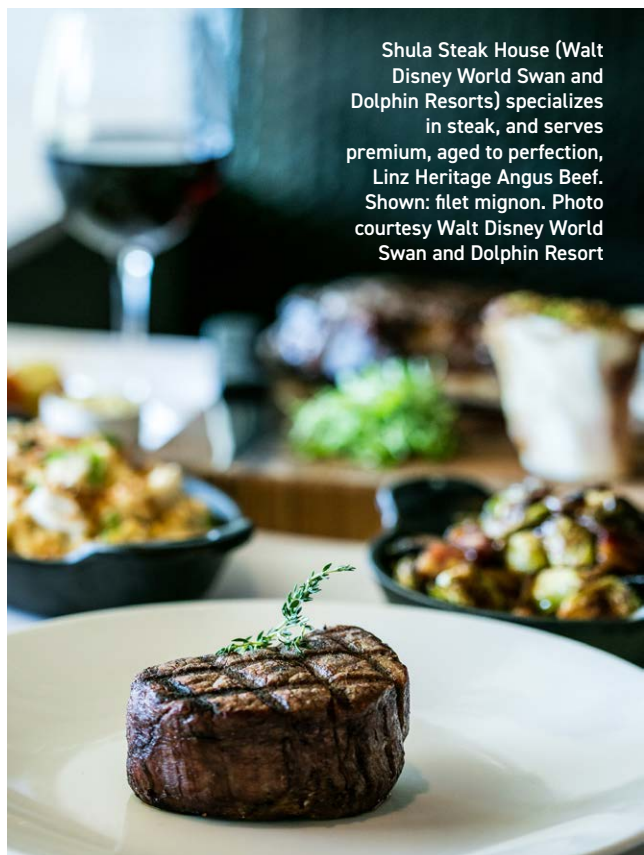
Diversity in dining

Orlando's food scene features everything from food halls to food trucks to farm-to-table restaurants to gastropubs to craft breweries.

"Orlando is a hospitality driven community where everyone is taking



Four Flamingos Florida Shrimp with guava and horseradish cocktail sauce. Photo courtesy Four Flamingos



Shula Steak House (Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resorts) specializes in steak, and serves premium, aged to perfection, Linz Heritage Angus Beef. Shown: filet mignon. Photo courtesy Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort





(Above) A sushi boat from Kimonos at Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort. Photo courtesy Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort

(Top Right) Pappardelle pasta with tomato and basil from Il Mulino (Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort). Photo courtesy Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort

(Right) Todd English's Bluezoo (at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort) serves a shrimp cocktail featuring poached jumbo shrimp, avocado puree, and Bloody Mary cocktail sauce. Photo courtesy Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort



part in making Orlando the best place to live and visit," Katurakes says. "Orlando's food scene has grown so much that it leaves people with a desire to come back and continue to explore the flavors from the place that has it all."

One of Orlando's biggest trends currently is the food hall, an air-conditioned respite that offers up a mini smorgasbord of local food vendors.



"We love a good food hall here, which has been a great way to continue to showcase local chefs and concepts," says Farrell.

Katurakes agrees. "Food halls are the new 'it' dining experience," he says. "They are popping up everywhere. They allow for people to share a meal while having the flexibility of choices on what they eat."

A few examples include:

- ◆ East End Market in Audubon Park
- ◆ Plant Street Market in Winter Garden
- ◆ Boxi Park in Lake Nona
- ◆ Henry's Depot in Sanford
- ◆ Marketplace at Avalon Park
- ◆ The Hall on the Yard in Ivanhoe Park
- ◆ À La Cart

There is also plenty of international influence throughout Orlando's city limits.

“Orlando has a huge variety of different types of cuisines, and that authenticity and passion from the local chefs and independent restaurants keeps people coming back,” says Kells.

Of course, you’ll find staples such as Mexican, Chinese, Indian, and Italian, but you’ll also find less common international options such as Turkish, Ethiopian, Polish, German, Spanish, Greek, and Laotian, to name just a few.

“Orlando in itself is a melting pot of cultures and tastes and there’s a little bit of each represented... Ethiopian, Turkish, Korean, German, Filipino... it’s all here,” says Kristine Palkowetz

with Orlando Food Lab, a group of ‘foodpreneurs’ that are dedicated to fostering the growth of the local Orlando-based food community in all food related areas. “You can order your food or beverage by the type of cuisine you’re craving and it seems no country’s food is off the table!”

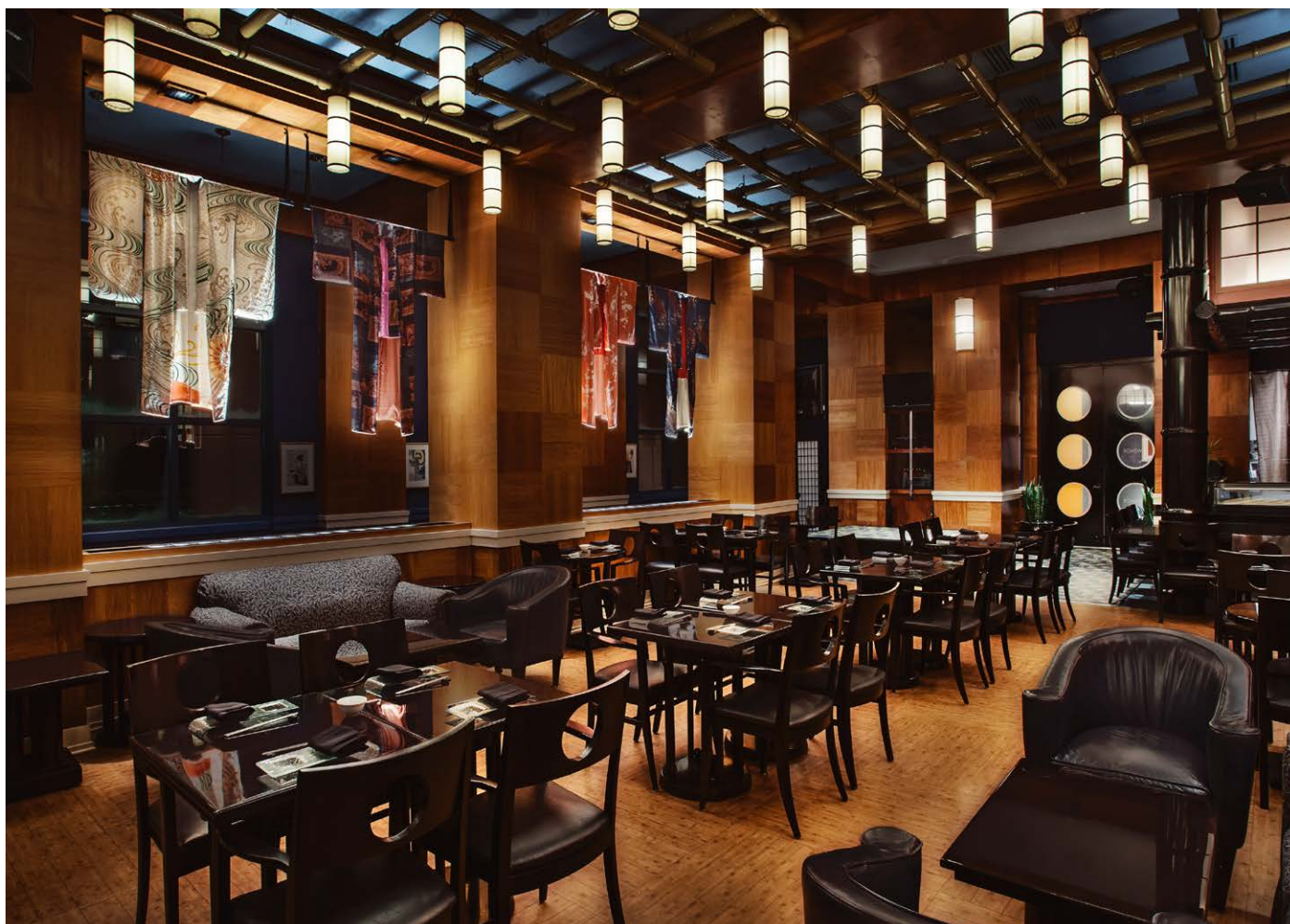
Additionally, Orlando is home to several hotel restaurants that are challenging some of the misconceptions that hotel restaurants are only mediocre at best (thanks in no small part to neighboring Walt Disney World® Resort).

“We have an incredible volume of hotels here, and in turn, we have

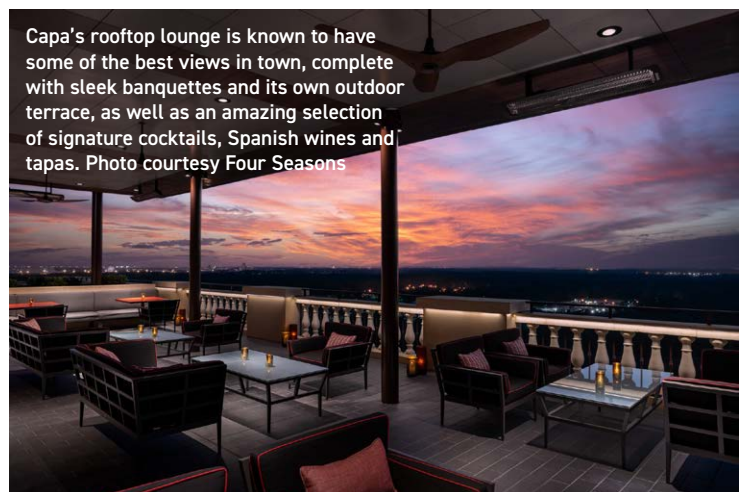
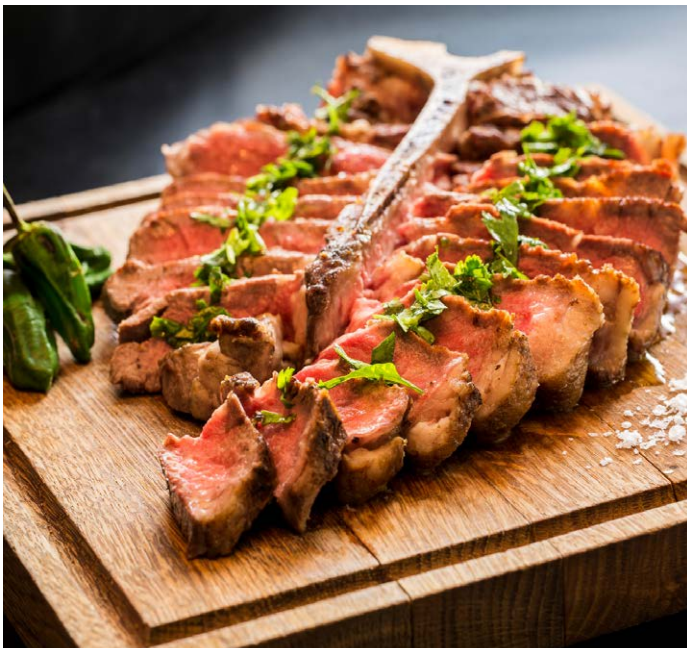
so many hotel restaurants serving high-quality cuisine from both local and celebrity chefs that those hotel restaurants have now become destinations in their own right for both visitors and locals,” says Kells.

Notable restaurants and chefs

With so many options of places to sit down for a meal, it may seem overwhelming to decide.



(Above) Award-winning Kimonos sushi restaurant (Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort) features such specialties as gyoza, octopus, shrimp, tempura platters, and Kobe beef satay. The décor at Kimonos features dark teakwood, colorful kimonos, and an intimate atmosphere. Photo courtesy Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort



Capa's rooftop lounge is known to have some of the best views in town, complete with sleek banquettes and its own outdoor terrace, as well as an amazing selection of signature cocktails, Spanish wines and tapas. Photo courtesy Four Seasons

(Above left) Capa's signature Gintonic (at the Four Seasons Resort at Walt Disney World) is made with Coarunn Gin, Fever Tree Mediterranean Tonic, gala apple, juniper, key lime, and garnished with citrus and botanicals to enhance the gin notes. Poured over an ice sphere, the drink is as beautiful as it is delicious. Photo courtesy Four Seasons

(Middle left) One of the signature dishes at Capa (a steakhouse at the Four Seasons Resort at Walt Disney World) is its 32 ounce porterhouse steak, served with Capa Steak Sauce, salsa verde, and pickled shishitos. Photo courtesy Four Seasons

(Bottom left) Sodexo Live! At the Orange County Convention Center offers a Living Mushroom Display where a mushroom log is put on display for guests to see while mushrooms are freshly cut from it and incorporated within their menu items. Photo courtesy Sodexo Live!



Capa, a Michelin Starred 17th-floor rooftop steakhouse and bar, boasts Spanish-influenced cuisine, ranging from fresh Florida seafood to small plates and expertly grilled cuts. Photo courtesy Four Seasons

“The seemingly endless number of incredible restaurants to choose from is a huge draw for Orlando,” says Farrell. “It may be a little overwhelming at first, but you’ll never get bored!”

One of Orlando’s latest and greatest options is actually Farrell’s homebase, the [Four Flamingos](#). At the Four Flamingos, acclaimed chef and beloved television personality, Richard Blais, combines the memory of vintage eras with the bounty of Florida to create a treasure-packed menu of the fresh-caught surf and fire-grilled turf variety.

“Four Flamingos is the evolution of the Floribbean concept,” says Farrell. “We blend vintage and modern aesthetics throughout the restaurant from the dining room itself with its spruced-up Hemingway House vibes to the menu which blends classic Florida flavors with modern takes and Richard Blais’s signature flair for molecular fun sprinkled throughout. We focus on quality Florida ingredients prepared with love and expertise and aim to provide food that is not just beautiful but truly delicious.”

Michelin has also recognized a total of 33 Orlando restaurants in the categories of Michelin Starred, Michelin Bib, and Michelin Recommend.

The four Michelin Starred restaurants are:

- ◆ [Capa](#): This rooftop steakhouse and bar boasts Spanish-influenced cuisine.
- ◆ [Kadence](#): This Japanese restaurant from Chefs Mark Berdin and Jennifer Bañagale features an intimate dining experience focused on multi-course tasting menus and an extensive, yet carefully-curated, selection of sake. The omakase opens with hot dishes and cool sashimi.
- ◆ [Knife and Spoon](#): A signature steak and seafood restaurant conceived and led by award-winning Chef John Tesar.
- ◆ [Soseki](#): An intimate 10 seat multi-course dining experience featuring a modern take on omakase. It’s a “chef’s choice” dinner exploring local Florida terra through partnerships with farmers, fishermen, cheese, and ceramic artisans.

A few other Michelin recognized restaurants include:

- ◆ [The Ravenous Pig](#): A modern gastropub (from restaurateurs James and Julie Petrakis) that features classic pub fare with creative Southern spins.
- ◆ [Prato](#): Flavorful Italian-American fare with a focus on wood-fired pizzas (from Park Lights Hospitality and Chef Brandon McGlamery) that blends Italian classics with modern techniques and seasonal ingredients.

(Right) Lobster Mac & Cheese (featuring lobster tails, cheddar cheese, gruyere cheese, and parmesan) from Sodexo Live! Photo courtesy Sodexo Live!

“Our food scene has grown exponentially and now the secret is out,” says Palkowetz.

Additionally, four chefs found themselves among the 2022 James Beard Foundation Awards semifinalists:

- ◆ Jason and Sue Chin from the [Good Salt Restaurant Group](#) (Outstanding Restaurateur award)
- ◆ Rabii Saber from [Four Seasons Resort at Walt Disney World](#) (Outstanding Pastry Chef)
- ◆ Evette Rahman from [Sister Honey’s](#) (Outstanding Baker)
- ◆ Henry Moso from [Kabooki Sushi](#) (Best Chef: South)

Moso was once again recognized by the James Beard Foundation, he was named a semifinalist in the 2023 awards last month. Jimmy and Johnny Tung [Bento Asian Kitchen + Sushi](#), [Doshi](#), and [Camille](#) were also named semifinalists in the category of Outstanding Restaurateur.

“Orlando has changed for the better, and as many new restaurants and chefs move into our city, they’re bringing their expertise



and knowledge and this is helping to elevate Orlando's visibility in the food and beverage scene all across the US and beyond," says Fabrizio Schenardi, executive chef for Capa at the Four Seasons Resort at Walt Disney World. "Many chefs, including myself, are working together in building culinary excitement and getting more recognition as a group."

Trending upward

So, what's in store for Orlando as its food scene continues its upward trend?

"We've seen many omakase spots opening lately, and similarly, small 8-10 seat restaurants with

chef's menus and beverage pairings," says Kells. "People are looking for intimate, personalized experiences, like education on the menu as to the exact farm or purveyor the ingredients in their dish are coming from.

"I think we'll also see an even stronger shift in fast casual dining offering high-quality, upscale ingredients beyond a standard everyday menu, to meet those expectations and demand."

So, as you pack your bags for Catersource + The Special Event (March 27-30 at the Orange County Convention Center) don't miss the opportunity to experience Orlando's growing food scene.

"Whether you are coming to Orlando for business or leisure, Orlando is a place for fun," says Katurakes. "The food scene is in full-force, and we are truly becoming the

destination where you come for the entertainment but stay for the food. Not only do you get to enjoy all the amazing things Orlando has to offer, but you can also eat your way through a unique dining experience."

"Orlando at face value is a mecca for national brands, but you just have to scratch the surface to find the incredible restaurants that truly define us," says Farrell.

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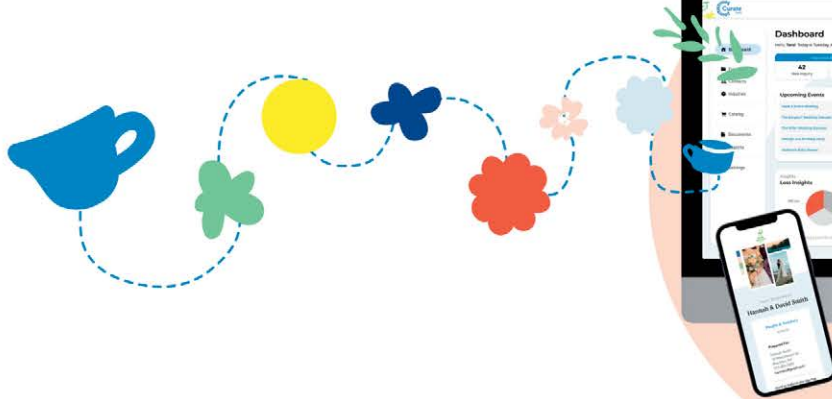
(Above) Todd English's Bluezoo (at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort) features coastal cuisine with both international and New American culinary influences. From the signature simply fish to the two-pound Maine "Cantonese" lobster, Bluezoo's menu serves blissful bites for every palate. The restaurant's award-winning design by Jeffrey Beers captures an ethereal, underwater theme with sophistication. Photo courtesy Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort

We're Off to Orlando

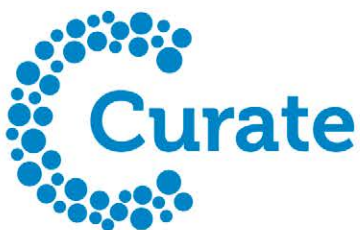
Get a taste of the Orlando food scene this spring when Catersource + The Special Event heads to the Orange County Convention Center March 27-30 where you can taste your way through the conference, and head to any of Orlando's top restaurants in the evening. And don't miss your opportunity to tour one of Orlando's top caterers when Puff 'n Stuff Catering opens up its facility to attendees of Art of Catering Food.

Learn more by visiting <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/>

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Where Minnesota Meets Hmong Cuisine

CHEF YIA VANG WILL DELIVER THE KEYNOTE SESSION
DURING ART OF CATERING FOOD ON MARCH 27TH



As recently seen on *Good Morning America*, 2023 James Beard-nominated and *Eater's* “Chef of the Year,” Chef Yia Vang has had one of his busiest years to date with his multiple projects including competing as a challenger on Netflix’s *Iron Chef: Quest for an Iron Legend*, hosting Food Network’s *Stoked*, and most recently premiered his new thrilling cooking and culture series *Feral* now airing and streaming through the Outdoors Channel.

Vang is also the owner and chef of the James Beard-nominated restaurant Union Hmong Kitchen located in Graze Food Hall in North Loop Minneapolis specializing in Hmong cuisine. Though Minnesota is home to the largest population of Hmong living outside Asia, no brick-and-mortar restaurant has been exclusively dedicated to Hmong cuisine until

Photo courtesy Eliesa Johnson



GRILLED BUTTERFLIED CHICKEN WITH LEMONGRASS SAUCE

YIELD: 4

Photo courtesy Laura Murray, Food Styling By Rose Daniels and Yia Vang for [Bon Appetit](#)

INGREDIENTS FOR SAUCE

- 6 ea. scallions, thinly sliced
- 3 ea. lemongrass stalks, bottom third only, tough outer layers removed, finely chopped
- 1 ea. 2-inch piece ginger, peeled, finely chopped
- 2 ea. garlic cloves, finely chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup vegetable oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp Aji-No-Moto umami seasoning (MSG; optional)
- Kosher salt

METHOD

1. Mix scallions, lemongrass, ginger, and garlic in a medium bowl. Heat oil in a small saucepan over high until hot but not smoking, about 2 minutes. Pour over scallion mixture. Let sit, stirring often to keep aromatics from burning, 5 minutes (scallions will sizzle, turn bright green, and wilt almost immediately). Mix in Aji-No-Moto seasoning (if using) and season with salt.

2. **Do ahead:** Sauce can be made 2 days ahead. Cover and chill.

INGREDIENTS FOR CHICKEN & ASSEMBLY

- 2 T coriander seeds
- 1 T cumin seeds
- 1 $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4-lb whole chicken, backbone removed
- Kosher salt
- 3 T vegetable oil
- Purple Sticky Rice (see recipe, next page) for serving

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

A spice mill or mortar and pestle

METHOD

1. Toast coriander seeds and cumin seeds in a dry small skillet over medium heat, shaking often, until spices are very fragrant and slightly darkened in color, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a spice mill or mortar and pestle and let cool. Finely grind, then transfer spice mix to a small bowl.
2. Place chicken, skin side up, on a cutting board. Using your palms, press firmly on breastbone to flatten breast; you may hear a crack. This means you're doing

it right. Set chicken, skin side up, on a large rimmed baking sheet. Season generously on both sides with salt, then sprinkle spice mix all over, getting in every nook and cranny. (You may have a little spice mix left over.) Tuck wings underneath the breast. Chill, uncovered, at least 4 hours and up to 2 days.

3. Let chicken sit at room temperature 1 hour before grilling. Drizzle with oil and pat all over.
4. Prepare a grill for medium-high indirect heat (for a charcoal grill, bank coals on one side of grill; for a gas grill, leave one or two burners off). Place chicken, skin side down, on grate over indirect heat. Cover grill, placing vent (if your grill has one) over chicken so it draws heat up and over it. Grill until skin is lightly browned, 15–20 minutes. Turn chicken over and cook, still covered, until skin is deep golden brown and crisp and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of breast registers 160°, 20–25 minutes. Transfer chicken to a cutting board and let rest at least 15 minutes before carving. Serve with lemongrass sauce and rice.

Vang and his business partner launched a Kickstarter campaign for Vinai, the Twin Cities' first brick-and-mortar restaurant devoted to "the past, present, and future of Hmong cooking." The Vinai space currently houses Slurp Noodle Shop, a new popup concept that Vang will rotate out every three months. Slurp currently has both "brothy" and "saucy" noodle dishes on its menu, including such dishes as Khao Poon (rice noodles, curried chicken broth, chicken, veggies and herbs, marinated bamboo shoots) on the brothy side, and Fun Fun Noodles (wide rice noodles, beef, peanut-chili sauce, toasted peanuts, pickles, herbs) on the saucy side.

Vang has also added keynote speaker to his already impressive resume, as he gears up to deliver his message

during this year's Art of Catering Food (March 26–27 in Orlando).

Catersource sat down with Vang to hear his thoughts on cuisine, working in the kitchen, and his upcoming appearance at Art of Catering Food.

Catersource: Where did your love of food and cooking begin?

Yia Vang: I actually didn't like it. I wanted to get rid of it. I tried to run away from it for awhile. Growing up, cooking wasn't the romantic and beautiful thing that everyone thought it was. Everyone had to pull their weight—either you washed the dishes, or you helped cook. It was literally just part of the chores.

It wasn't until after college that I realized it was something that I really wanted to do. I really believed

in the philosophy that you cook the way you are, and I wanted to cook the food I knew and that I was familiar with.

CS: What is it about food that makes it such an important part of our everyday life?

YV: For me coming from a Hmong family, when you don't have a country, you have to find something identifiable in that culture. Food is sustenance, we all eat, but our cultural identity is intricately woven into the food that we eat. That food actually tells a story of where we are, where we've been. Preserving history starts with food.

Also, as you get older you kind of want to answer the question of 'Who am I?' The answer took me to my mom and dad's table. I

PURPLE STICKY RICE

Photo courtesy Laura Murray, Food Styling by Rose Daniels and Yia Vang for Bon Appetit

YIELD: 4

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup glutinous sweet rice
- 3 T black rice

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

- 2 ea. layers of cheesecloth

METHOD

1. Place both rices in a colander and rinse several times under cold running water until water runs clear. Drain well. Transfer to a medium bowl; pour in cold water to cover by 2". Cover and chill 12 hours.
2. Line a metal steamer basket with cheesecloth (you need enough to wrap around rice). Pour water into a medium pot to come 2" up sides, then set basket inside. Drain rice and place inside basket; bring cheesecloth up and over rice to cover. Set pot over medium heat. Cover and steam rice until tender, 20–25 minutes.





BLISTERED GREEN BEANS WITH FRIED SHALLOTS

Photo courtesy Laura Murray, Food Styling By Rose Daniels and Yia Vang for Bon Appetit

YIELD: 4

INGREDIENTS

- ½ ea. small shallot, finely chopped
- 1 ea. garlic clove, finely chopped
- 1 ea. lemongrass stalk, bottom third only, tough outer layers removed, finely chopped
- 1 ea. 1-inch piece ginger, peeled, finely chopped
- 3 T vegetable oil
- 1 lb green beans, trimmed
- 1 T oyster sauce
- Kosher salt
- Store-bought fried shallots, for serving

METHOD

1. Crush shallot, garlic, lemongrass, and ginger in a mortar and pestle to a coarse paste; set aside. (If you don't have a mortar and pestle, chop very finely.)
2. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high. Arrange green beans in a single layer; cook, undisturbed, until browned underneath, about 3 minutes. Using tongs, turn beans over and cook, tossing occasionally, until deeply browned in spots and tender, about 5 minutes. Add reserved lemongrass mixture; cook, tossing, until fragrant and tender, about 1 minute. Remove from heat. Add oyster sauce, season with salt, and toss to coat.
3. Transfer green beans to a platter and top generously with fried shallots.

understand the food; I understood their story. There was this whole world that I never saw, I saw a different world and that there's something bigger here. I'm part of something bigger. How can we use this food as a canvas to paint the story of their story? It's their legacy echoed on a plate.

CS: What is your process for developing a new dish or new menu?

YV: Memories. It's all about memories. It's activating memories. That's what drives us. Every time you are making food, every time you're eating, these flares are going off in your head and that's what drives you to think of good menus—creating good times, which turn into good memories.

CS: What inspires you in the kitchen?

YV: Fortifying mom and dad's legacy; creating a great work atmosphere where we have a tribe; being a fan of good food.

CS: How has food and culinary evolved during your career?

YV: Everything is so global now. The world has come to us.

CS: Hmong cuisine has grown quite a bit recently in terms of recognition and popularity, what do you attribute to this?

YV: Our ability to say that there are more stories out there. How do we keep hunting for all these stories? We are natural learners, so we need to be curious eaters.

CS: What is your favorite thing to cook?

YV: I don't have a favorite; I go through spurts. One day I want to make a really great sandwich, the next I want to focus on a duck dish. I have food commitment issues.

CS: What is your favorite thing to eat?

YV: Again, I don't really have a favorite. I'll eat a lot of spice-forward dishes for awhile, but then I'll get sensory overload and eat Jimmy John's. I love chain restaurants, though. Growing up, I never got a chance to go, so I'm living my childhood dream now. I'm very particular about chicken nuggets.



SEE CHEF YIA VANG LIVE

There is a story behind every kind of food. For **Chef Yia Vang**, star of TPT's *Relish* series, *Iron Chef*, and the new Outdoor Channel series, *Feral*, it's Hmong food. Join Vang as he talks about the food and flavor profiles that inform his work, and his gentle and beautiful approach to "mine" versus "ours" in regard to food culture. A tasting will accompany his session, followed by a meet and greet.

Art of Catering Food is delighted to welcome Chef Vang to the stage on **Monday morning, March 27th at 9:15 a.m.**

Photo courtesy Eliesa Johnson

CS: What are some of your tips and tricks for working as a chef?

YV: A chef has to wear three different hats. First, they have to be great cooks. Next, they need to know how to work with people. Lastly, they need to know how to operate systems.

CS: It's been said that you like to change how people think about food by considering the influences in each bite, can you elaborate on this?

YV: Our food is very driven in a Eurocentric style of eating. Everything looks really pretty and I remember going over to my friends' houses as a kid and their mom would ask if they could make me a plate. In Hmong culture, you don't make someone a plate, you give them a plate and invite them to the table because everyone is equal and there's no limitation to the plate.

My food, it's not pretty, the restaurant is small, but it's ours. Nobody is taking this away from us, and we take pride in what we have here. We're never going to say these are small plates, or these are shareable plates because all of the plates are shareable. The menu is meant to be shared. There's no individual ordering. That's a first world problem right there.

CS: Can you discuss Slurp, your new noodle pop-up?

YV: We want the space to be a blank canvas and put in a new pop-up on a rotating schedule from our team. We want to keep that area fresh, it's a canvas. It's going to be a good training ground for our younger chefs.

CS: Can you give an update on the opening of your new restaurant Vinai?

YV: Our target is the end of summer, maybe fall. It's going to be a completely different feel, we're going to be taking a deep look at the food that I grew up with, especially woodfired grilling. Smoke and fire are a key ingredient.

I hate when people tell me that I'm elevating Hmong food, I don't call it elevated. It's food from my mom and dad, the problem was that it came from a poor country and poor people and it was thought to have no value. We are blessed to have a platform to talk about this.

CS: In regard to AOCF, can you speak to the importance of chefs learning from other chefs?

YV: We're all in our own world, you're in your station, your head's down. But your station is only a small part of how the whole kitchen works, and the



TRI-TIP STEAK WITH TIGER BITE SAUCE

YIELD: 4

Photo courtesy Laura Murray, Food Styling By Rose Daniels and Yia Vang for Bon Appetit

INGREDIENTS FOR STEAK

- 2 T Sichuan peppercorns
- 2 T coriander seeds
- 1 T cumin seeds
- 2 lb tri-tip steak or two 1-lb. sirloin steaks
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 3 T oyster sauce
- 1 T fish sauce

METHOD

1. Toast Sichuan peppercorns, coriander seeds, and cumin seeds in a dry small skillet over medium heat, tossing often, until spices are very fragrant and slightly darkened in color, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a spice mill and let cool; finely grind.
2. Pat steak dry; season all over with salt. Whisk oil, oyster sauce, fish sauce, and spices in a large bowl. Add steak; turn to coat. Cover and chill 4–12 hours (for the most flavor go the full time).
3. Remove steak from marinade and place on a plate. Let sit at room temperature 1 hour before cooking.

4. Prepare a grill for medium-high indirect heat (for a charcoal grill, bank coals on one side of grill; for a gas grill, leave one or two burners off). Grill steak over direct heat until lightly charred, about 2 minutes per side. Move steak over to indirect heat and cover grill, placing vent (if your grill has one) over steak so it draws heat up and over it. Grill, turning steak occasionally, until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of steak registers 120°, 20–25 minutes for medium-rare.
5. Transfer steak to a cutting board and let rest 15 minutes before slicing it against the grain.

INGREDIENTS FOR SAUCE & ASSEMBLY

- 1 ½ cups cherry tomatoes
- 1 tsp vegetable oil
- 1 ea. small shallot, finely chopped
- 4 ea. garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 4 ea. Thai chiles, finely chopped
- ½ cup finely chopped cilantro
- 1 T fish sauce
- 1 T oyster sauce
- Purple Sticky Rice (see recipe on previous page spread) for serving

Little Gem or butter lettuce leaves, for serving

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

A spice mill

METHOD

1. While the steak is resting, place a wire rack on direct heat side of grill, arranging so bars run perpendicular to grate. Toss tomatoes with oil in a medium bowl; season with salt. Grill tomatoes in a single layer on rack, turning occasionally, until lightly charred all over and beginning to burst, about 5 minutes. Return to bowl as they're done and let cool.
2. Pulse shallot, garlic, chiles, and a pinch of salt in a food processor until mixture starts to resemble a paste. (This is even better in a mortar and pestle, which will create a finer texture.) Add cilantro and pulse until very finely chopped.
3. Lightly crush tomatoes with your hands and add shallot mixture, lime juice, fish sauce, and oyster sauce. Season sauce with salt; let sit 10 minutes. Serve steak with sauce, rice, and lettuce.



POTLUCK CHOPPED SALAD

YIELD: 4

*Photo courtesy Laura Murray, Food Styling By
Rose Daniels And Yia Vang for [Bon Appetit](#)*

INGREDIENTS

- 4 ea. large eggs
- 1 ea. garlic clove, finely grated
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup buttermilk
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup mayonnaise
- 1 T chopped dill
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp Aji-No-Moto umami seasoning
(MSG; optional)

- 1 ea. romaine heart, quartered lengthwise,
cut crosswise into 1-inch pieces
- 1 ea. small carrot, peeled, cut into
matchsticks
- 1 ea. medium radish (such as watermelon
or black), cut into quarters through
root end, thinly sliced
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups mixed tender herb leaves
(such as Thai basil, cilantro,
dill and/or mint)

METHOD

1. Bring a medium pot of water to a boil. Carefully lower eggs into water with a slotted spoon and cook 8 minutes. Transfer eggs to a bowl of ice water and let cool. Remove eggs from ice water, pat dry, and peel. Slice eggs crosswise and set aside for serving.
2. Whisk garlic, buttermilk, mayonnaise, dill, and Aji-No-Moto seasoning (if using) in a large bowl to combine; season with salt and pepper. Add romaine, carrot, radish, and herbs and toss to coat; season with salt.



SWEET AND SPICY CUCUMBER SALAD

YIELD: 4

*Photo courtesy Laura Murray, Food
Styling By Rose Daniels And Yia Vang for
Bon Appetit*

INGREDIENTS

½ ea. bunch cilantro
1 ea. small shallot, finely chopped
1 ea. garlic clove, finely grated
2 ea. Thai chiles, finely chopped
¼ cup tamarind concentrate*
2 T fresh lime juice
2 tsp fish sauce
6 ea. medium Persian cucumbers or
1 ea. large English hothouse
cucumber, some peel removed
in thin alternating strips, halved
lengthwise, thinly sliced on a
diagonal
1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
Kosher salt
Store-bought fried shallots, for serving
Coarsely chopped salted dry-roasted
peanuts, for serving

*Tamarind concentrate, often labeled
“concentrate cooking tamarind,” can
be found at Asian and Thai markets
or online.

METHOD

1. Thinly slice cilantro stems until you have about 2 Tbsp. and place in a large bowl. Coarsely chop remaining cilantro; set aside for serving.
2. Add shallot, garlic, chiles, tamarind concentrate, lime juice, and fish sauce to bowl with cilantro stems and mix well. Add cucumbers and tomatoes, season with salt, and toss until everything is nicely dressed.
3. Transfer salad to a platter and top with reserved chopped cilantro, then fried shallots and peanuts.



Food is sustenance, we all eat, but our cultural identity is intricately woven into the food that we eat. That food actually tells a story of where we are, where we've been. Preserving history starts with food.

— CHEF YIA VANG



whole rhythm will be thrown off if one thing goes down. You have to dare to try something new and fail. You know that you are part of something bigger and when you respect each other's area, you learn to respect what people are doing and understand. Before you ask someone to change something on a menu, ask them why. What's the story behind it? Every dish has a narrative, if you look close enough you get to the people.

CS: What are some of the lessons you hope to share with the AOCF crowd?

YV: I want to challenge everyone to really think about the why. Why are you cooking the food you are cooking? I want everyone to find their inspiration to be aspiring. You better know your way. 



Announce The F Sunshi



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Register Now!

For nearly 30 years, Catersource Conference & Tradeshow has been the best place to expand your network, learn from industry veterans, and get inspired about your career. Now that one of the toughest times in our history is behind us, what better way to celebrate than to gather and learn from one another and network!

Join Catersource, co-located with The Special Event, as we celebrate the next chapter of the catering and events industry!

This year will be bigger and better with several additions, including the return of the Art of Catering Food, as well as the new Event Escape experience rooms. Get ready to grow as we celebrate the wonderful world of catering and events!



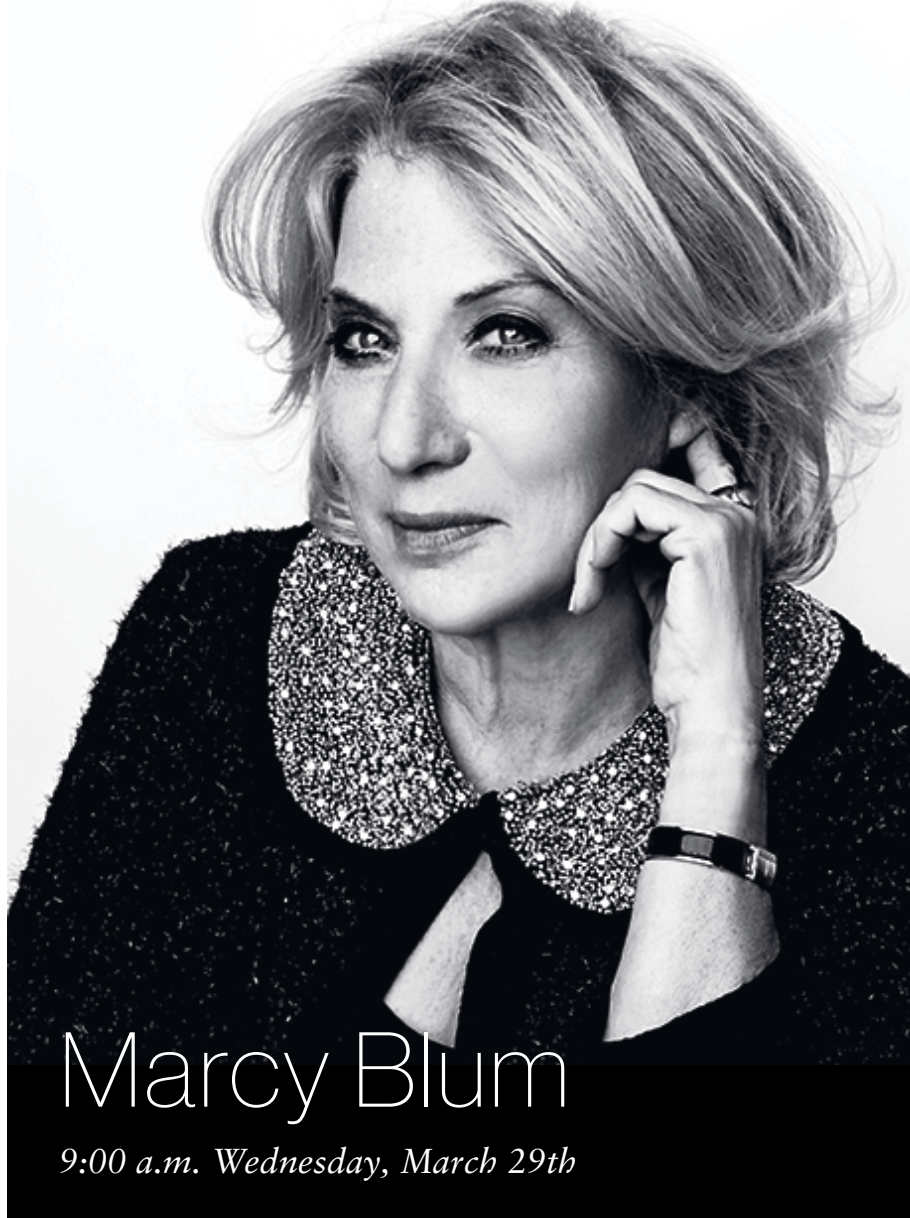
Don't miss a moment!
Arrive early on Monday 3/27,
depart Friday morning 3/31

When making your travel arrangements, plan to arrive early on Monday so that you can enjoy the entire Catersource + The Special Event experience!

Kick off your week by participating in our Venue Tour (starting at **1:00 p.m.**) then make a night of it by joining us at **Connect Live**, held at **Big Fin Seafood Kitchen**, starting at **7:30 p.m.** and ending at **10:30 p.m.** End your week by joining us at the **Closing Night Celebration** at **ICON Park**.

In between, you won't want to miss a thing.

Here's a look at all that will be offered!



An “eventista,” Marcy Blum is an expert in entertaining, etiquette, food, and wine. She has been producing creative, magical, and personal events for over 30 years, launching Marcy Blum Associates in 1986 and is frequently noted as an innovator in the events industry. Blum infuses her culinary arts background with her humorous and sane approach to entertaining, to create extraordinary memories for her clients.

A graduate of the Performing Arts High School and the prestigious Culinary Institute of America, Blum produces events where the entertainment and décor are elegantly

theatrical, the food is delicious and creative, the wines are thoughtfully chosen, and the service is beyond spectacular.

Blum is the author of the best-selling *Wedding Planning for Dummies* and *The Wedding Kit for Dummies*. She has been named a top international event planner by *VOGUE*, *Harper's BAZAAR*, and *Martha Stewart Weddings*, and is named one of the country's five best planners by *The New York Times*. Blum has been a featured guest on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Good Morning America*, *The Today Show*, *Live with Regis and Kelly* and has been named a ‘tastemaker’ for Homegoods. Blum has produced the weddings of Savannah and LeBron James, Kyra Sedgwick and Kevin Bacon, Jennifer Gates and Nayel Nassar, Tamiko and George Soros, Kevin Love and Kate Bock, Rickie Fowler, Billy Joel, Katie Lee, Nate Berkus and Jeremiah Brent, and

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Art Smith

9:00 a.m. Thursday, March 30th

Chef Art Smith is the executive chef and co-owner of Blue Door Kitchen & Garden in Chicago, Southern Art & Bourbon Bar in Atlanta, Art & Soul in Washington DC, Art Bird & Whiskey Bar at Grand Central Terminal in New York City, and Chef Art Smith's Homecomin' Florida Kitchen & Southern Shine Bar at Disney Springs at the Walt Disney World® Resort.

Smith has received two James Beard Foundation awards, the culinary profession's highest honor, and has cooked for some of the world's most famous celebrities. In 1997, Smith became the personal, day-to-day chef to Oprah Winfrey, a position that lasted 10 years. Smith now coordinates and cooks for special events all around the world. He is a frequent guest on the Food Network, the Cooking Channel, and Bravo.

Smith is the author of *Back to the Table*; *Kitchen Life: Real Food for Real Families*; *Back to the Family*; and *Art Smith's Healthy Comfort*, with a focus on healthy cooking and healthy living.

Smith is the founder of Common Threads, a non-profit organization teaching low-income children to cook wholesome and affordable meals since 2003. He believes that through hands-on cooking and introducing children to fresh foods we can help prevent childhood obesity, reverse the trend of poor eating habits, and learn about diversity and tolerance through the celebration of our cultural differences and our commonalities.

In 2015 Smith launched a non-profit organization, Reunion, Florida Garden and Kitchen School, in Madison, FL at

the historic Wardlaw-Smith House near his childhood home in Jasper, FL. At Reunion students of all ages receive free classes on Southern cooking traditions, horticulture, and weather forecasting via Weather Stem systems.

In 2008 Smith received an Honorary MBA Degree, awarded by the Dedman School of Hospitality at Florida State University. On May 19, 2012 Smith received an Honorary Doctorate of Culinary Arts from Johnson and Wales University, North Miami Campus.

Smith lives in Chicago, IL and Jasper, FL with his husband, artist Jesus Salgueiro.

Catersource talked with Smith about his thoughts on working with children, healthy eating, and his upcoming appearance during Catersource + The Special Event.

Catersource: How has food and culinary evolved during your career?

AS: Food and culinary has evolved, yet also stayed the same. I never changed my style. By staying true to my roots, my career evolved. My love of food came from my upbringing with lots of very talented loving cooks. Seeing how they brought our family together really inspired me.

CS: Can you describe your background in catering?

AS: It's made my life. I've catered since I was 18 years old. My restaurant business was founded on my parties in my home. Even at my age now, catering has always been my bread and butter. For me, doing the parties is one thing, but having a team that knows what they're doing is the secret to success. Catering is one of those businesses where the ability to take food and transport and create this atmosphere is magic in itself. During my time at Disney*, I saw firsthand how Disney manages and creates

Lakshmi and Salman Rushdie. Of her event highlights include Donny Osmond's 50th birthday, several of the original opening events for Comedy Central, the very opening of Société Générale in New York City, parties for Regis and Joy Philbin, and celebrations for the Rockefeller family. Catersource + The Special Event is delighted to have Marc Blum to the stage to discuss his philosophy for presenting clients with unforgettable events. Turn to page 24 in the Spring *Special Events* magazine for more on

Marcy Blum live

Opening General Session on the show floor, Blum will kick off the Catersource + The Special Event experience and tradeshow on **Wednesday, March 29th at 9:00 a.m.** with session ***The Old Razzle Dazzle: Tips for Reaching the Next Level of Hospitality***. The Opening General Session is included in the purchase of any pass, from All Access to Tradeshow only.



Register Now!

like no other. There's no better people who can make it happen. It's truly an art, so how do you create that magic? It doesn't matter if it's in a home, or a stadium, or a hotel ballroom, people are seeking that feeling, that community spirit, that connection so they don't just feel like they're at a big noisy party. By creating that magic, you're using food and experience to connect people. You should always have a parachute, and my parachute has always been the fact that I can cook, and that I can throw a party. A good party will save you.

CS: How would you describe your outlook on your career?

AS: The whole part of doing great business is knowing the client. You have to plant the seed for great business, you can't go in for the kill at first, you have to seed it. People remember you regardless of it's good or bad, so make sure it's always good.

CS: Can you speak to why your charity work (with both Common Threads and Kids Café) is important to you?

AS: Our world is a large quilt and its people are the fabric—colorful swatches of beautifully woven material—all joined together by these common threads: family and food. If we want a global future, we must do this because as our world is getting smaller and smaller. Food is love; it brings us together. People care a lot about the fact that you give back and they want to know it's coming from a good place. It's accountability now.

CS: Why is it important to expose children to different cultures, like through Common Threads?

AS: Our mission at Common Threads is to educate children on the importance of nutrition and physical well-being, and to foster an appreciation of cultural diversity through cooking. We help bridge cultural boundaries and strengthen our global family by teaching children about their similarities and differences in the warm comfort of the kitchen. When we sit down at the table, we all speak the same language.

CS: In regard to Kids Café, why was targeting children and healthy eating habits something you are passionate about?

AS: My mother Addie Mae taught me this: You got a problem? Feed it. Hunger is the main beginning of most problems. There are no angry people, just hungry people. If you want to get children interested in what they're eating, a way of enticing them is to teach them how to cook. Kids Café has morphed into a healthy cooking program that has reached over 120,000 kids. Restaurants come and go, but changing a child's life has a permanent impact and lasting value.

CS: I know diet and healthful eating is very important to you, why?

AS: Well, it's more about living a sustainable, balanced life than diet. You probably don't go to a Southern restaurant to eat healthy, but if you're having fried chicken, balance it with a nice salad. And Southerners eat more vegetables than anyone can possibly imagine.

CS: How have you applied this philosophy to your own life?

AS: Balance in all things is key!

CS: How has healthful eating impacted your own health, specifically in regard to your diabetes?

AS: Eating properly and having great medicine and a great doctor is the key. When I was first diagnosed, I went on a diet and lost 100 pounds. If you're careful, diet and medication can reverse [a slide into diabetes]. I've been very fortunate with that. Most people eat too much processed food and consume too much white sugar. Now I'm running marathons.

CS: What is it like cooking for high-profile clients (i.e. politicians and celebrities)?

AS: Busy people don't like busy food! People who affect the world don't live by the Michelin Starred guide. Whether I'm cooking for my neighbor or Nelson Mandela, the formula is always the same; simple, comfort food. People say to me, 'This reminds me of my mother's cooking' or 'This reminds me of my grandmother's cooking'—hook, line, sinker; we have caught them!



See Art Smith live

At the Closing General Session on the tradeshow floor, Smith will wrap up the 2023 Catersource + The Special Event conference and tradeshow on **Thursday morning, March 9th at 9:00 a.m.** with his session **Creating a Grand**. The Closing General Session is included with the purchase of any pass, from All Access to Tradeshow only.

CS: What are some of the strangest requests you've gotten from your high-profile clients?

AS: What would probably surprise most people is the requests for simple, comfort foods: Campbell's Tomato Soup and a grilled cheese sandwich.

CS: What unique challenges come with cooking for high profile clients?

AS: There is a great amount of trust, security, loyalty and respect! You're expected to honor that code.

CS: How would you describe the current evolution of Southern cuisine?

AS: It's evolved, but it's gone back to its roots. People want authentic.

CS: What do you consider the best places to eat in the Orlando area?

AS: Boathouse, George's Wine Bar, and Pizzeria Napoli.

CS: What is your favorite thing to cook?

AS: Soup and baking bread.

CS: What is your favorite thing to eat?

AS: Chocolate and homemade sourdough.

CS: What are some of the lessons you hope to bring to audiences during your closing keynote?

AS: Pay attention to the man behind the curtain and see and learn the magic. Food isn't complicated. Remember food without a story doesn't taste good.

** In 1981, Chef Art Smith was enrolled in the first Magic Kingdom College Program (now known as the Walt Disney World College Program). He now owns Art Smith's Homecomin' Florida Kitchen & Southern Shine Bar in Disney Springs and is the first alumni to have opened a restaurant on Disney property, he says.*

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the writer and sources. The writer and sources are not affiliated with the Walt Disney Company, and this article is not authorized or endorsed by the Walt Disney company or any of its affiliates. All Disney-related trademarks are property of Disney Enterprises, Inc.

New Voices



Renee Adams

ROAS, CTR, KPI...Oh My! Decoding Digital Marketing Musts from the Top Online Marketers in the World

2:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 29th



Lindsey Leichtham

Stop Taking Sh! Food Photos!*

2:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 29th



Miro Diamanté

Drag Queens, Taylor Swift, & House of the Dragon, OH MY! A Pop-Centric Approach to Relationship Building & Sales

11:15 a.m. Tuesday, March 28th



Ryan Manning

Chef's Approach to Mixology

10:00 a.m. Tuesday, March 28th



Hugh Groman

Build a Better Team by Meeting Your Staff Where They Are

11:00 a.m. Thursday, March 30th



Lenn Millbower

Mousify Your Meetings for MAG Results

12:30 p.m. Thursday, March 30th



Sarah Hall

How to Break into the Luxury Wedding Market

11:00 a.m. Thursday, March 30th



Grace Odogbili

Pan-African Cuisine: A Fine Fusion Approach

3:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 29th



Ian Ramirez

*Shock & Awe:
Experiential Marketing
at Your Wedding Venue*

**8:30 a.m. Tuesday,
March 28th**



Robert Turner Jr.

*Engagement: A New Way
to Create and Sustain
Powerful Relationships*

**2:30 p.m. Tuesday,
March 28th**



Jim Rand

*Building a Profitable
& Sustainable Off-
Premises Catering
Brand*

**11:15 a.m. Tuesday,
March 28th**



Pam Smith

*Veg-"Abilities":
Curating Plant-
Forward & Plant-Based
Menu Items that are
Cravable, Flexible &
Forgivable*

**8:30 a.m. Tuesday,
March 28th**



Meredith Ryncarz

*Take Better Marketing
Photos of Food with an
Iphone*

**1:15 p.m. Tuesday,
March 28th**



Jennifer Trotter

*Jedi Mind Tricks:
Mastering Words and
Communication to Lead
Your Clients to Yes*

**2:30 p.m. Wednesday,
March 29th**



Keith Sarasin

*How To Crush Your Next
Pop Up Dinner*

**1:15 p.m. Tuesday,
March 28th**

*Misconceptions &
History: An Exploration of
Indian Cuisine with Chef
and Cookbook Author
Chef Keith Sarasin*

**2:30 p.m. Wednesday,
March 29th**



Marti Winer

*Executive Presence
as a Creative
Professional*

**4:00 p.m. Tuesday,
March 28th**

Top notch culinary

If you hope to expand your culinary operations in 2023 and beyond, there is a terrific line up of chef-forward classes available on the Culinary Experience stage at Catersource. Chefs will not just talk about their concepts, they'll demonstrate them, too. You can also participate in hands-on classes that will help boost your skills in a variety of areas.

Gain access to trending recipes, learn how to design allergy friendly menus, get insight into how to curate plant-forward and plant-based options that are craveable, get inspired with culinary theatrics, and discover Pan African and Indian cuisines—these are just a few of the culinary classes you will experience.

The Art of Catering Food Returns

Experience the Art of Catering Food (AOCF), an event designed for chefs, and taught by chefs. Over the course of two days (March 26–27) leading into Catersource + The Special Event, you'll connect with experienced catering chefs sharing new culinary techniques, the latest trending ingredients, food costing, and everything else you need to turn your menus into works of art.

Turn to page 30 for more on the return of this boutique event, and then make your way over to page 44 to hear from AOCF keynote (and 2023 James Beard-nominated) Chef Yia Vang.

Certified Catering Consultants

Need a quick consultation about some aspect of your business? The Certified Catering Consultants (CCC) will offer free half-hour appointments on site to address your catering-related challenges, identify your highest value opportunities, and/or help you improve your business and ROI. The CCC team has been consulting with caterers for over 20 years and many of them ran businesses of their own—or

still do! Head to room W233 to [sign up](#) for a free consultation during show hours.

Candid Conversations

Always a favorite, Candid Conversation sessions are free-wheeling “unsessions”—no set agenda or full on Powerpoint presentations; just an industry professional at the front of the room, ready to answer your questions about topics they excel at. Put the **Footers Catering** team in the hot seat; have a give and take conversation with **Roy Porter**; or discover the secret to zero waste with **Dana and Paul Buchanan**.

Discover new ideas on the tradeshow floor

This year's tradeshow floor looks a bit different—we'll be mixing Catersource exhibitors with The Special Event exhibitors for less of a “church and state” feel. After all, we are family—events and catering are hand and glove. You'll be able to browse, learn from, taste samples, and buy from a plethora of trendsetting and relevant exhibitors, who are here to help you grow your business and recognize potential.

Additionally, an edge-of-your-seats culinary competition (DICED), and the excitement of the Opening General Session with keynote Marcy Blum open the first day of the tradeshow floor and Closing General Session with keynote Chef Art Smith will end the week on Thursday.

New this year, the tradeshow floor will have a happy hour on Wednesday afternoon starting at 4:00 pm. Make it a two-fer by checking out *Cocktail Trends with Pasha & Jeff* on the Keynote Stage, and then make your way over to the Exhibit Hall for happy hour to sample a tasty cocktail!

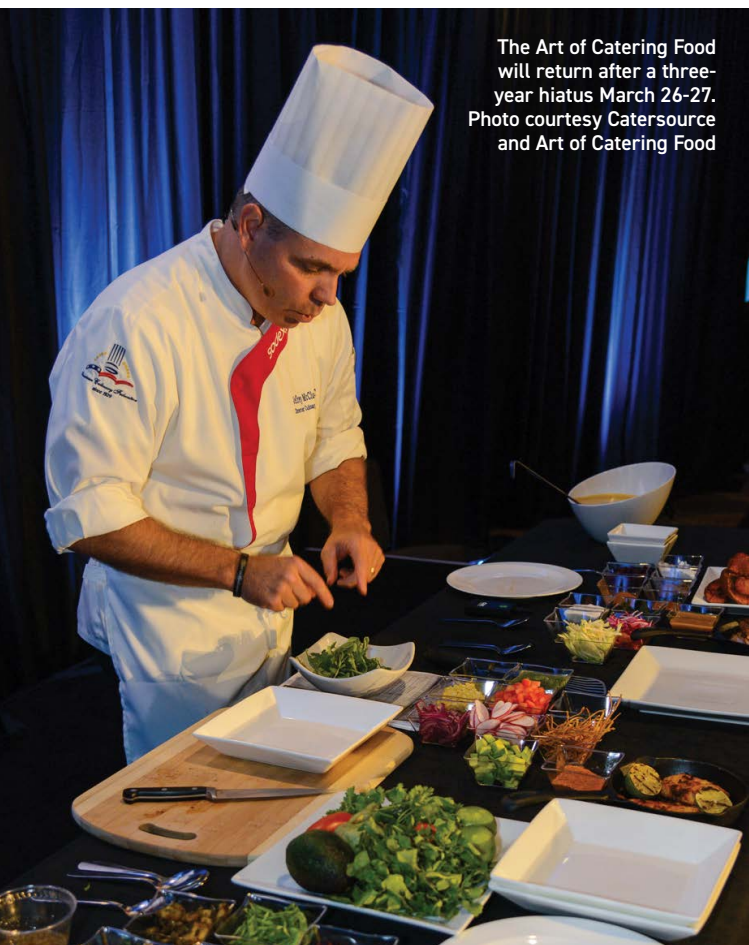
Additionally, there will be a hands-on tablescape session on the tradeshow floor at 11:15 a.m. on Wednesday. Join expert Las Vegas florists Michelle Howard and Mylo Lopez for a fun and interactive competition where teams will be tasked to create fabulous tablescapes with all the trimmings.



There will be plenty of chances to sample on the Catersource tradeshow floor, as well as at the Art of Catering Food this year. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



Larger than life displays, like the grazing boards seen during last year's event, are always popular among attendees. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



The Art of Catering Food will return after a three-year hiatus March 26-27. Photo courtesy Catersource and Art of Catering Food



Don't miss any of the top notch culinary sessions on the Culinary Experience Stage. Photo courtesy Catersource and Art of Catering Food

 *Register Now!*

New this year! The Event Escape

This year we're bringing in exciting brand activations in the form of immersive experience rooms, where you'll be able to create memorable moments and share photo ops on social media for all your friends and followers to see.

Here's the details on these can't-miss-rooms:

CS+TSE 2024: Uncover Austin, TX, Room W332

**Open Tuesday through Thursday
during regular show hours**

It's no longer a secret! Catersource + The Special Event will head next to Austin, TX in 2024! Austin is known as the Live Music Capital of the World®, but, oh—it is so much more than that. This genuinely unique destination, the capital city of the Lone Star State, has a soundtrack all its own, weaving in art, culture, incredible food, and breathtaking outdoor activities. Step into this event escape and learn about the city, enjoy activities, and pick up a little Texas twang while you're at it.

Wellness Lounge, Room W333

**Open Tuesday through Thursday during
regular show hours**

Need some time to recharge your internal batteries? Head to the Wellness Lounge, where soothing music, beautiful scents, and comfortable seating awaits. This isn't a room for chatty interaction, but a place to reflect and recharge. This escape will also be the gathering spot for morning yoga sessions, Charessa Sawyer's event therapy class on Thursday at 11:00 a.m., and much more. Come relax, unwind, and breathe deeply before rejoining sessions and stepping onto the exhibit hall floor.

Don't miss Michelle
Howard's floral
design session on
Tuesday at 4:00 p.m.

Floral Design Lab, Room W334

**Open at various times Tuesday through
Thursday during regular show hours**

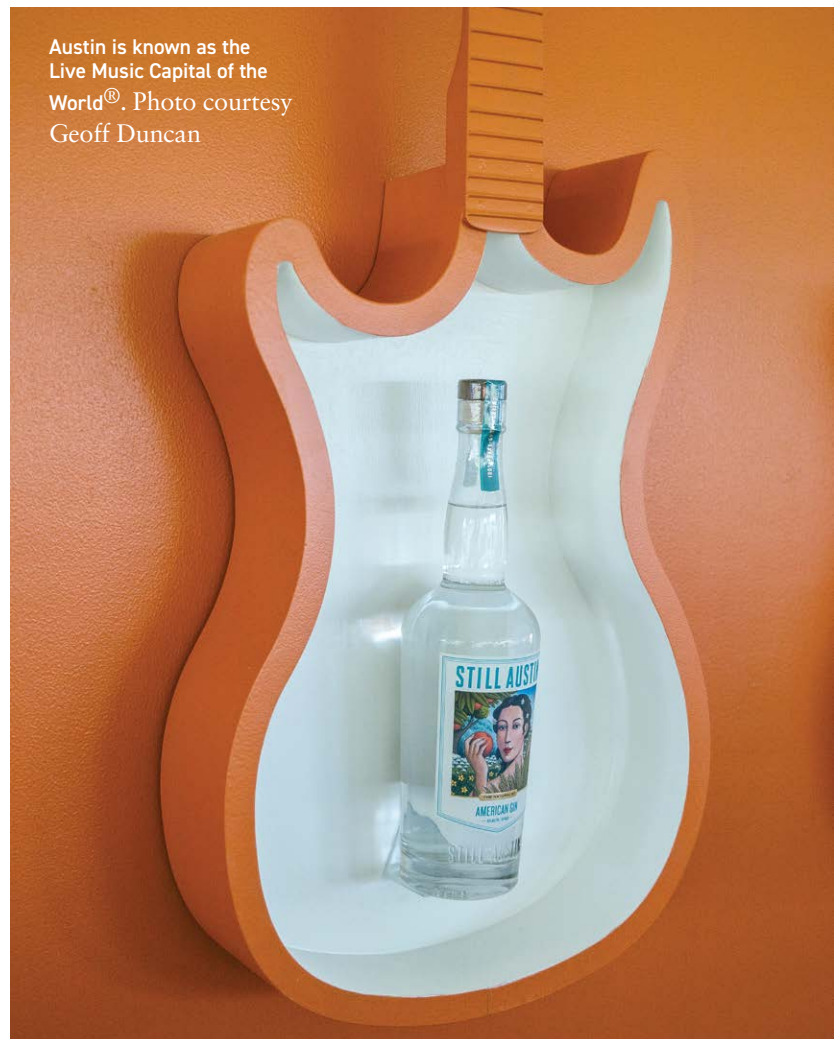
Observe florists Michelle Howard of Flora Couture and Mylo Lopez of Mylo Fleur (both Las Vegas, NV) construct beautiful pieces they will showcase in their Tuesday afternoon session *Let's Talk Floral 1.1* (230C, 4:00 p.m.). Come on in and converse with these two artists and their teams, or stop and smell the roses! Same goes for Wednesday, as they ready their florals for the *Hands-On Tablescape* session on the exhibit hall floor (11:15 a.m., back right of exhibit hall). If you have ever wanted to see how florists work and/or be a part of their world, this is the escape you have been dreaming of!

Don't miss this exciting new addition!





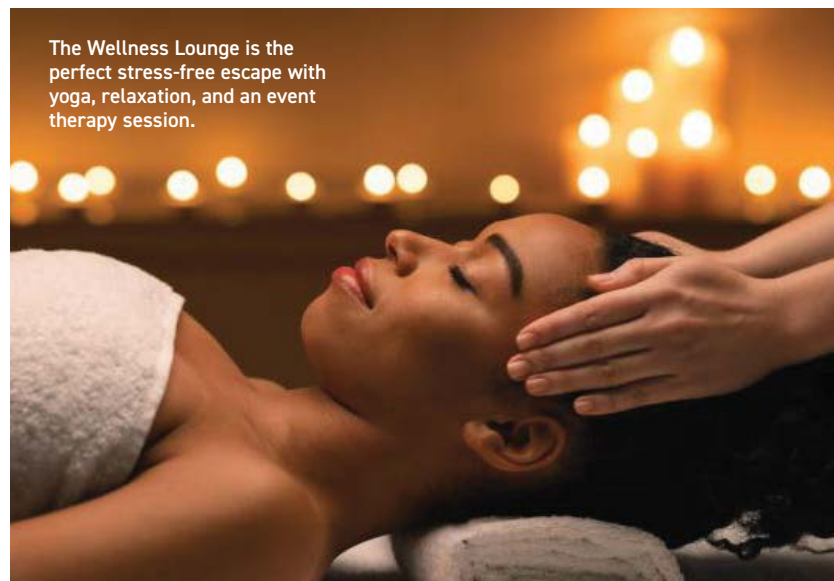
Catersource + The Special Event 2024 is headed to Austin, TX. Stop by the Uncover Austin Escape Room for a sneak peak. Photo courtesy Visit Austin



Austin is known as the Live Music Capital of the World®. Photo courtesy Geoff Duncan



by the Floral Design Lab
see two floral artists at work
throughout the week. Photo
courtesy WASIO Photography



The Wellness Lounge is the perfect stress-free escape with yoga, relaxation, and an event therapy session.

 *Register Now!*



Industry accolades: award recipients

Each year, we honor industry leaders who we, at Catersource + The Special Event, feel have made a significant and positive impact on our industries.

Join us in celebrating recipients **Warren Dietel** (Michael Roman Lifetime Achievement award, turn to page 96 for our feature on Dietel); **Kate Patay** (Richard Carbotti Gala award, turn to page 66 in the adjoining *Special Events* magazine for a profile of Patay); **Michael Cerbelli** (Special Events Gala Lifetime Achievement award); and **Michael Dominguez** (our first-ever MeetingsNet Lifetime Achievement award), at our annual **Awards Ceremony on Thursday, March 30th** on the conference Keynote Stage, prior to the **Closing Night Celebration**.

Catersource + The Special Event 2023 will also feature the annual **ACE, Gala, and ICA CATIE Awards**, which will be presented during the **Awards Ceremony**. Turn to page 70 to see this year's ACE Award nominees.

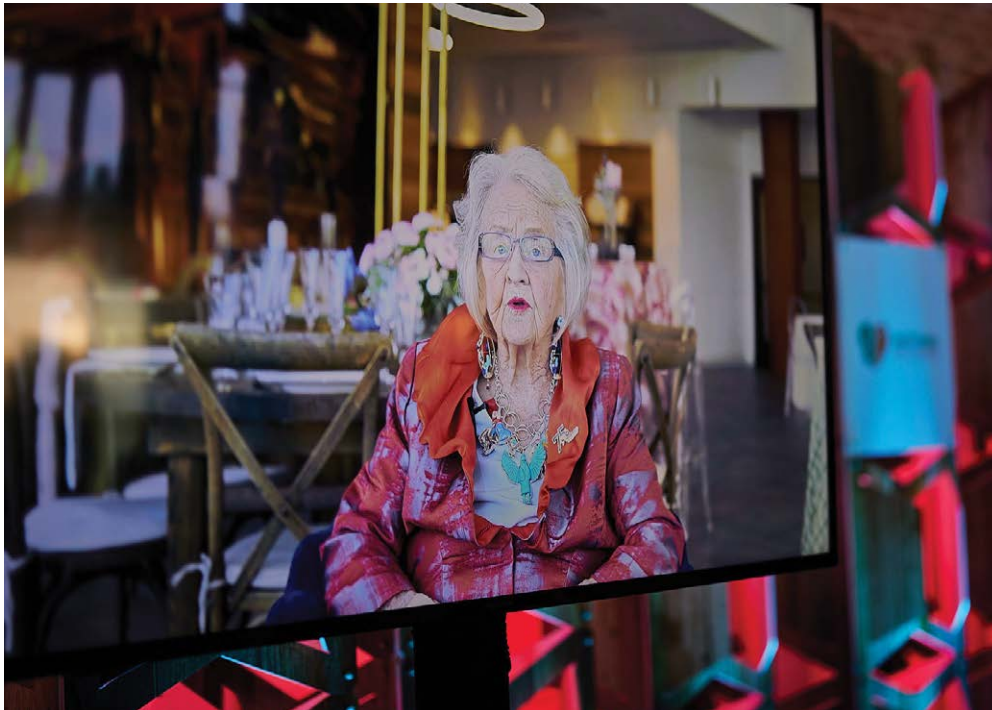
With a kick off keynote by Cerbelli, this will be an unforgettable evening.

Additionally, enjoy a beautiful lunch with your colleagues and peers during our annual **Leadership Lunch on Thursday, March 30th** at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts where we'll celebrate the **surprise award recipient of the Steve Kemble award**.

(This page from left to right) This year's Leadership Award recipients are: Kate Patay (Richard Carbotti Gala award); Warren Dietel (Michael Roman Lifetime Achievement award); Michael Cerbelli (Special Events Lifetime Achievement award).



Michael Dominguez will receive this year's first-ever MeetingsNet Lifetime Achievement award.



(This page clockwise) Lenny Talarico was last year's Special Events Lifetime Achievement award recipient; Kelly Murphy received the Richard Carbotti Gala award in 2022; Steve Kemble presented last year's award to Nancy Shaffer; Rosemary Kowalski was 2022's Michael Roman Lifetime Achievement award recipient. She accepted in a video address. Photos courtesy WASIO Photography

 *Register Now!*

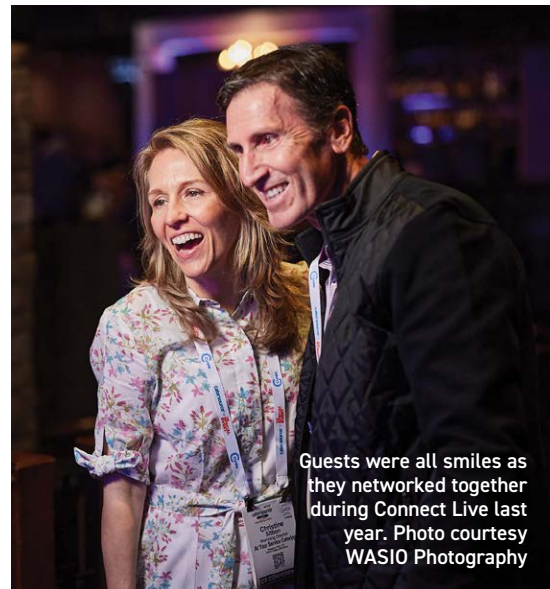
Enchanting evening events

There will be plenty of showstopping moments during the evening events, like this living fountain during last year's Closing Night Celebration. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



Enchanting evening events

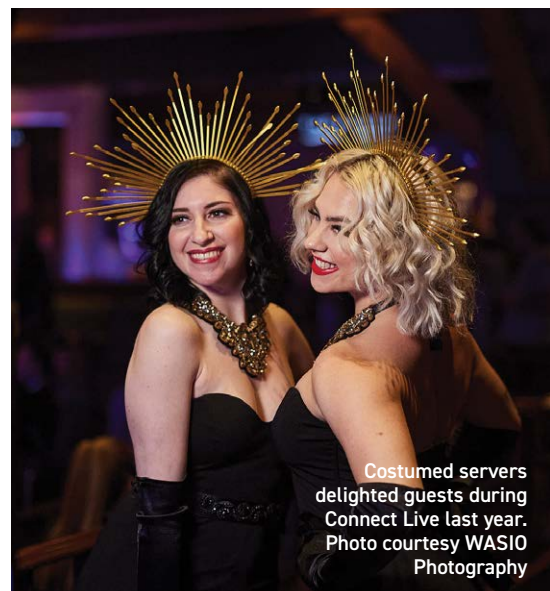
Every evening features a different venue and event theme, all developed to bring you the latest trends in a setting that also grants you the time and space to connect with friends, peers, and colleagues.



Guests were all smiles as they networked together during Connect Live last year. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



The evening events will offer plenty of tasty libations throughout the week. Shown: Kavas Margarita. Photo courtesy Kavas



Costumed servers delighted guests during Connect Live last year. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

Monday March 27 • Big Fin Seafood Kitchen

Chair: Jean-Michel Santacreu, JMS Event Design & Production

On Monday evening, kick off your week right by connecting with friends and colleagues at our opening welcome reception, which brings attendees of Art of Catering Food together with Catersource + The Special Event.

Tuesday March 28 • Hampton Social/Kavas/Pointe Orlando

Chairs: Gabrielle "Gabby" Mourina, Imprint Events Group & Selina Mullinax, CORT Events

It's time to celebrate in the Florida sunshine with colleagues from far and near during the Opening Night Party. Inspired by the coastal and playful atmosphere of the Hampton Social and the vibrant and cultural experience of Kavas, this Coastal Fiesta Block Party at the Pointe will be designed to delight the senses. Be sure to move throughout the three indoor and outdoor locations where you'll find exciting entertainment, delicious small bites, and plenty of rosé and reposado. This evening reception will allow you to choose your own adventure and connect with fellow industry professionals to create an unforgettable experience!

Wednesday March 29 • Canvas

The can't miss networking celebration to raise funds for our industry is back! Join the SEARCH Foundation for their Annual Signature Event and mingle with top industry professionals all while supporting friends and colleagues in crisis.

Not attending the SEARCH event? This is the perfect opportunity to hit the town with your teams and peers and enjoy a taste of Orlando. Turn to page 34 to see what Orlando's food scene has to offer.

Thursday March 30 • Ole Red/Brother Jimmy's BBQ/Tapa Toro

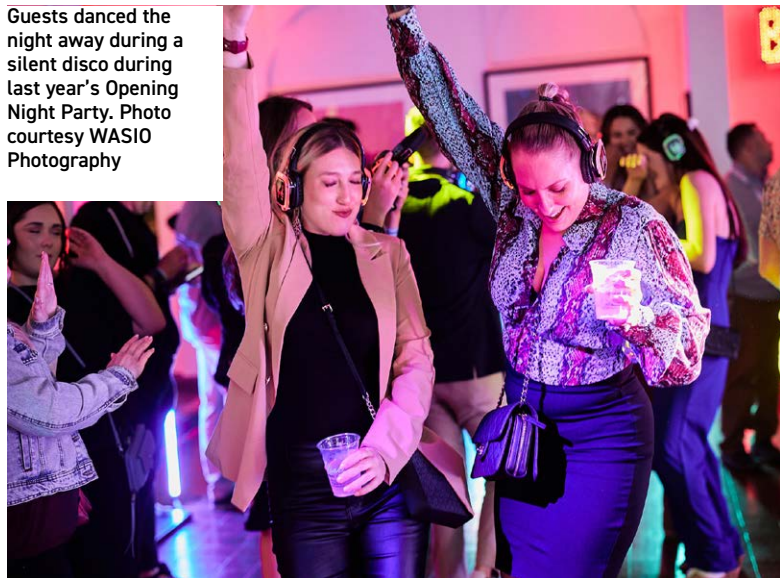
Chairs: Chef Boris Seymore, BDS Catering & Productions & Jenice Stallings, Styles By Stallings

Celebrate with colleagues amidst an International Block Party as we wrap up a great week for our industry during the Closing Night Celebration. Stroll between nine different regions, stop by activations, and check out some live entertainment.



Ole Red (owned by Blake Shelton) will be part of the Closing Night Celebration's International Block Party. Photo courtesy Ole Red

Guests danced the night away during a silent disco during last year's Opening Night Party. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



Guests can stop by Brother Jimmy's BBQ during the Closing Night Celebration. Photo courtesy Brother Jimmys BBQ



Schedule at a Glance

Monday

Venue Tour (USTA, The MEZZ, Vu, ICON Park)

1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Connect Live at Big Fin Seafood

7:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.

Tuesday

Conference education

8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Opening Night Party at Hampton/ Social/Kavas/Pointe Orlando

7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Wednesday

Opening General Session

9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. (doors at 8:30 a.m.)

Tradeshow floor

10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

DICED competition

11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

Conference education

1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Hall Happy Hour

4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

SEARCH's Annual Signature Event

8:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

Thursday

Closing General Session

9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. (doors at 8:30 a.m.)

Tradeshow floor

10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Conference education

11:00 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.

Leadership Lunch at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts

11:45 a.m. to 1:45 p.m.

ACE/Gala/CATIE Awards Reception

4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

ACE/Gala/CATIE Awards on the Keynote Stage

5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Closing Night Celebration at

ICON Park

7:30 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.



Regis



(This page clockwise) There's always something new and exciting to be found at the bookstore; Catersource exhibitors will be mixed with The Special Event exhibitors this year; Pass times are the perfect opportunity to say hello to friends and colleagues; There's no better chance to network than over a drink at one of the evening events. Photos courtesy WASIO Photography

Register Now!

Associations & groups

Associations and groups (some of them new to the conferences) will be present at Catersource + The Special Event, many of which will also have booths on the tradeshow floor and/or in the conference area. Take the time to seek these people out and learn more! We are all in this together and hope to learn from each other.

Here is a look:

- [The Academic Event Professional \(AEP\)](#)
- [Certified Catering Consultants \(CCC\)](#)
- [International Caterers Association \(ICA\)](#)
- [International Caterers Association Educational Foundation \(ICAEF\)](#)
- [International Live Events Association \(ILEA\)](#)
- [Leading Caterers of America \(LCA\)](#)
- [Live Events Coalition \(LEC\)](#)
- [SEARCH Foundation](#)
- [Wedding International Professionals Association \(WIPA\)](#)
- [Wedding Venue Map](#)

Networking opportunities

Beyond the evening events and Tuesday morning welcome gathering, there's plenty of time to say hello and move between the tradeshow floor and conference rooms during pass times. Most sessions allow 30 minutes pass time. Enjoy time with peers in our two conference-area networking spaces, and buy a ticket to our Thursday Leadership Lunch at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts, to discuss high level ideas with peers.

Earn education credits

Continuing education is an important aspect of any career trajectory and Catersource + The Special Event is ready to help.

All classes have been approved for CMP (Certified Meeting Professional) credits.

Go to "Associations & Accreditations" on the left-hand rail on schedule.catersource.com and sort to find what you need! 





And the Nominees are...

Let's give a round of applause to this year's ACE Award nominees!

by Amber Kispert

The Achievement in Catering Excellence (ACE) Awards are back this year and the nominees are stronger than ever!

Catersource magazine is delighted to announce the nominees for the 2023 ACE Awards, which will be handed out during *Catersource* + The Special Event on March 30th in Orlando, FL. *Special Events* magazine will also be handing out its Gala Awards. Turn to page 56 in the adjoining magazine for this year's nominees.

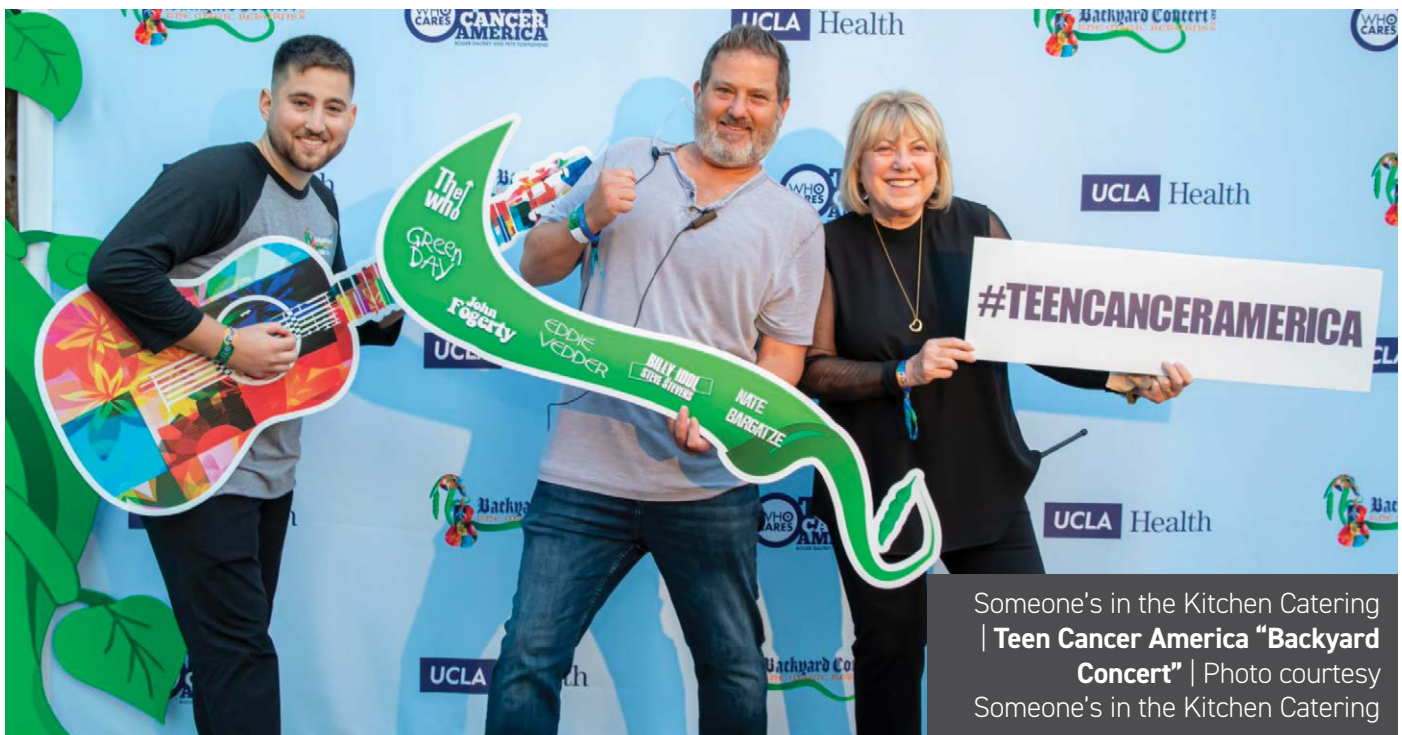
Without any further ado, please congratulate your 2023 ACE Awards nominees!

ACE
Achievement in Catered Events

CATERED FUNDRAISING EVENT OF THE YEAR



LEO Events | **Le Bon Appetit**
Photo courtesy LEO Events



Someone's in the Kitchen Catering
| **Teen Cancer America "Backyard Concert"** | Photo courtesy
Someone's in the Kitchen Catering



THE FLORIDA SUNSHINE TOUR: ACE AWARD NOMINEES

NATIONAL CATERER OF THE YEAR



Colette's Catering & Events
Photo courtesy Kayla Denae



24 Carrots Catering & Events
Photo courtesy Jackie Culmer

BEST OFF PREMISE CATERING



24 Carrots Catering & Events |
Autumn's Up Fall Festival
Photo courtesy Andy Rodriguez

Colette's Catering & Events |
A 'Love at First Rose' Wedding
Photo courtesy Valorie Darling



24 Carrots Catering & Events |
Variety is the Spice of Life
Photo courtesy Clark Studio



THE FLORIDA SUNSHINE TOUR: ACE AWARD NOMINEES

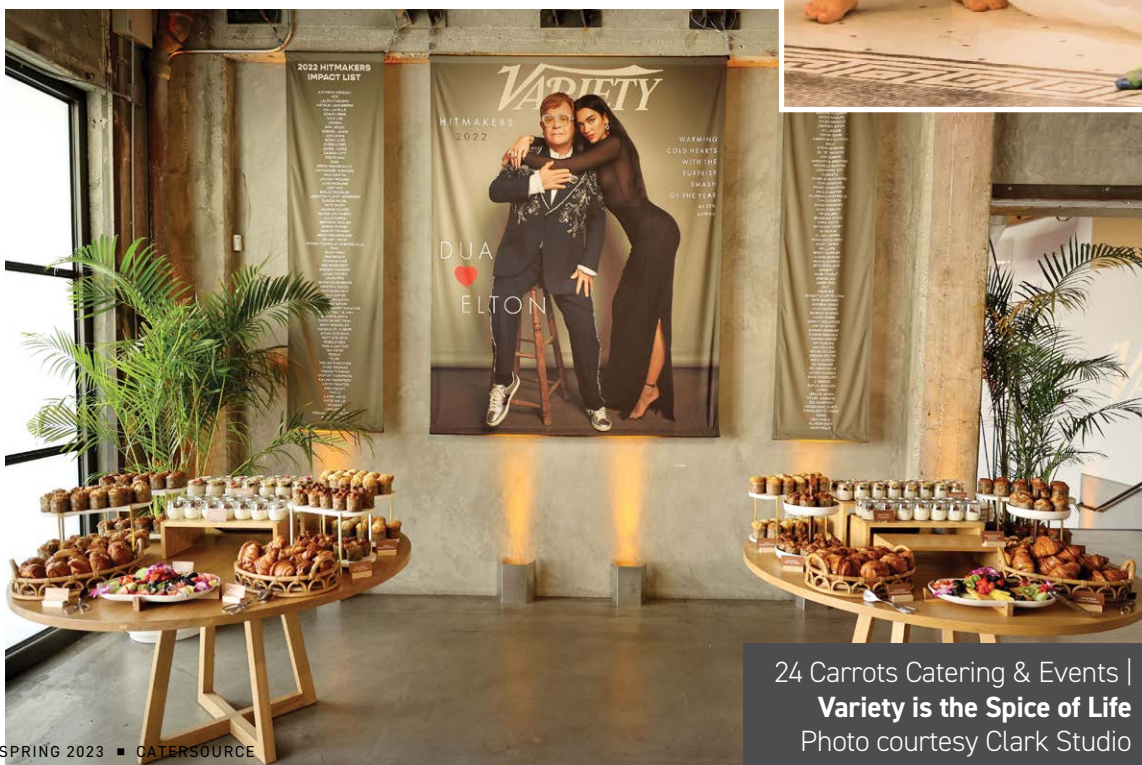


24 Carrots Catering & Events |
Autumn's Up Fall Festival
Photo courtesy Andy Rodriguez

CATERED SOCIAL EVENT OF THE YEAR



Detroit Athletic Club | **Life is a Fairy Tale-Back to the Club Weekend**
Photo courtesy DAC Photography



24 Carrots Catering & Events |
Variety is the Spice of Life
Photo courtesy Clark Studio

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OR
LAN
DO

by Robin Selden



Truffled Forestier with black garlic aioli.
Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events



Everything Tuna Reuben. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events



Veggie Fillo Candies with tamarind yuzu chutney. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events

Are You Up For the Challenge?

The only way to grow is to challenge yourself, right? That goes for your culinary team as well. If you want your culinary team to grow and to prosper you need to challenge them. They need to feel uncomfortable, possibly insecure, yet supported, and pushed to get out of their daily routine, to believe in themselves, and to trust that no matter the outcome, the fact that they tried is the only way to better themselves.

We've found that the successful recipe to challenge our team has been to encourage their creativity, build their confidence, and let them compete in our culinary challenges.

Twice, and sometimes, three times a month for the first quarter of the year

we post our challenges, and the results are astounding! Some of the best menu items that we've added to our repertoire come from these challenges. The growth that we see in our team and the confidence boosts are insane.

Here's how they work.



Robin Selden is the Managing Partner & Executive Chef of Marcia Selden Catering & Events and Naked Fig Catering, where she oversees the culinary and marketing operations for her family's multimillion-dollar company. In October 2019, Robin was honored to be named to the BizBash1000 celebrating the top 1,000 event professionals in the USA in 2019 and to the BizBash 500 celebrating the top 500 event professionals in 2020 in the United States. Selden is in the President's Council as a past President of the International Caterers Association and won their Chef of the Year award. She's a past Innovative Chef of the Year and a current Ambassador Chef for the Greenwich Wine & Food Festival.

Determine what your menu needs are

We often engage our sales team to understand what they would love to see. Since they have the pulse on what sells, they are the best barometer to know what items need to be reinvented.

Once you've determined your needs, pop them into a spreadsheet because you must be extremely organized. Suggestions can be as specific as: chicken or beef, hors d'oeuvres, embellished salads, short rib entrée presentation, plated or passed desserts—the possibilities are endless. I will use our most recent chef's challenge as an example. We did an hors d'oeuvres challenge and asked for vegan and gluten free beef, chicken, and lamb hors d'oeuvres.

The challenge

For the challenges, which always occur on Mondays, we post a sign in the kitchen that describes in detail what is expected. The actual presentations happen a week or so later, giving our team enough time for R&D.

“They are pushing each other to grow and to be better with each item that they make.”

For this example, the challenge read: *“Create one new hors d’oeuvres preparation from each of your two selected categories.”*

Each team member that participates (even our pastry team joins in), randomly selects two of the categories that we have put into a chef’s hat, and pass around. Last week we had 15 participants, which as you’d imagine was great, as we had 30 hors d’oeuvres.

“Hors d’oeuvres must be artfully presented, one bite, garnished and served as they would be at an event. Please prepare 24 of each so that we have enough for the judges to taste as well as a full presentation as it would be at a party on one of our hors d’oeuvre trays.”

“Must have: Name of the item with a description as well as a typed recipe without your name as the

judging will be blind. Feel free to ask the front office team to help type them for you.

“Must be ready to serve at 1:00 p.m. on XXXXX.”

“FYI...any special ingredients needed may be ordered. Please have order lists in by XXXXX at 1:00 p.m.”

“Think outside of the box... we are looking for creativity, taste and style. Something that we do not currently offer, and that we can add to the menus now.”

Once each chef has selected their hors d’oeuvres categories, it’s exciting to see the creativity start to flow; cookbooks and food magazines are covering their workstations as they dive in for inspiration. You’ll find them spending their breaks on the kitchen computers researching, others will be perusing the walk-ins and dry storage waiting for that item that will jump out and inspire them.

What I love most is that while they all know that it’s a competition, they come together and help to support each other’s ideas, to make recommendations and champion each other. Sometimes they also deliver the not-so-great news which is that they think they may need to move in a different direction and try something else. The truly beautiful dynamic here is that they care about each other and the overall success of each person over winning the challenge. Don’t get me wrong, they all have egos and want to win, but what’s great is they want to win against something that is equally as great or better than what they are doing. Do you see what’s happening here? They are pushing each other to grow and to be better with each item that they make. As a business owner,

seeing this camaraderie, internal growth, and bonding is all you could ever want for your team.

Challenge prep

In the meantime, while the chefs are creating their dishes, we do the following to get organized:

- Judges are selected at random for each of the challenges from our operations and front office sales and marketing team; they always include the principals plus three additional team members. This is a coveted role to be in and once again helps to bring our team together.
- Next, we select, also at random, the team member who will be making the presentations of the items to the judges. All are presented anonymously as to keep the playing field even.
- Our conference room is set up with six judges’ stations to include their ballot sheets, a pen, waters, a trash can, disposable plates, and a photo light box to photograph all the items.
- We purchase the winning gift cards, which are distributed at the deliberations that happen the following morning. For our challenges, we have a first-place winner that wins a \$100 Visa Gift Card, second place gets \$50 Visa card, third place gets a \$25 Visa card, and fourth place gets a \$10 coffee card.
- Each individual hors d’oeuvres is judged on the following categories: presentation, taste, creativity, and recipe. Each category is given a score from one to 10 (10 being the highest score). The scores are added together to give a final score for that item.



Freeze Dried Buffalo Cauliflower Popcorn.
Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events



BBQ Barbacoa Taco Bites. Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events

Challenge day

Challenge day is here, so let the games begin! The energy in the kitchen is so exciting! They are hyping each other up with each tray that leaves the kitchen. The judges assemble at their table and the presenter begins presenting the hors d'oeuvres one at a time, giving the judges ample time to photograph each item, taste, judge, and make notes.

The chefs anxiously await the presenters' return to the kitchen, trying to see if there is any indication of how they did. The presenter repeats the process until all the items have been presented.

Meanwhile, after the last item is served, the judges sit to review and tally their scores and to determine the top four scores. At this time, they decide who will give the feedback for each of the items at the judges' presentation the following day.

Each hors d'oeuvre is thoughtfully criticized and we encourage the judges to speak the truth but in a kind and gentle manner, particularly if they are delivering bad news on a not-so-great item. We do this, not to discourage anyone's future participation in our challenges, but because they need to hear the truth. Bringing a positive spin on something negative is always a better route to take and it makes it much easier to deliver when it's being done blindly.

Additionally, we share ideas for potential revisions that would make an item one that we would sell and ask those team members to go back to the R&D drawing board and to present the revised items within one week of the challenge. Our goal here is to have great new hors d'oeuvres to add to our menus, so if we think that tweaking one to get it there would be worthy of their time and efforts, we suggest it. Our other goal is to encourage our team to continue pushing themselves and not to look at this as a loss, but rather as a win personally and professionally.

And the winners are...

Time to announce the winners! Each of the winners is announced beginning with the fourth highest scored item. At this time, the chefs who made the hors d'oeuvres come forward and their identity is finally revealed. As a leader and a mentor to our team, this moment is thrilling to me as invariably the winners are not who we imagined. The boost of adrenaline and pure joy in their faces is amazing! What's extraordinary is that two of the winners were team members that were the most hesitant to participate in the challenge and literally complained throughout the entire process!

As I was walking back to the office, one of them pulled me aside to say 'thank you'. She said she never imagined that she could ever win a challenge like this and that she was grateful that we encouraged her and didn't give up on her. The best part is that she didn't give up on herself and she accepted the challenge and went for it ... clearly, she was up for the challenge and didn't even realize it. Just yesterday she came to my office to inquire about when the next challenge will be. THAT is why we do these. She is now excited to contribute and to be creative and will hold her head up high when she sees her winning hors d'oeuvres featured at an event or showcased on our social media. Challenge accepted! **CS**

See Robin Selden LIVE!

You can see **Robin Selden** live and in-person at Catersource + The Special Event, March 27-30 in Orlando, FL during the following sessions:

- She will deliver the welcoming address and emcee the first day of **Art of Catering Food** on Sunday, March 26th at 9:00 a.m.
- She will co-present **The Power of Leadership & Team Development** on Tuesday, March 28th at 2:00 p.m.
- She will emcee this year's **DICED Competition** on Wednesday, March 29th at 11:00 a.m.

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CATERING TO DIVERSITY

BY AMBER KISPERT





SO MUCH MORE THAN SAMOSAS

What to Know When Catering a South Asian Wedding

South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, etc.) weddings have long been known for their opulence, traditions, and, in some cases, spectacle. But in relation to the menu, there's myriad approaches to these over-the-top affairs (which can sometimes last for up to seven days).

“The food culture is so different among cultures and sub-cultures,” says Rajan Mistry with District Events and Catering, which specializes in South Asian weddings. “It’s no different than saying you want barbecue, or you want Mexican food here in the states—you have California Mexican, you have Tex Mex, you have Arizona Mex, you have Kansas City barbecue, you have Carolina barbecue—it’s all the same preparations, techniques, and what to serve when, but with different interpretations of the same food item.”

Despite the differing interpretations though, the cuisine at South Asian weddings is a lot more than just samosas and chicken tikka masala.

Food as status

Food is important for any type of wedding, but regarding South Asian weddings, it now has the added layer of representing the ritualistic

A finalist for the 2022 Gala Awards, Jessie Khaira incorporated a ferris wheel into her “7 Day Private Estate Wedding.” Photo courtesy Blush Wedding Photography

merging of two families, and by opting for lavish menus, that idea can be cemented for guests.

“Food for all of us at the very core signifies survival and fulfillment of our basic necessity in life,” says Ruchir Mewawala with Rose Events, which specializes in luxury Indian weddings. “Indian weddings are milestone celebrations where often a lavish production is put forth; the plethora of food and the display of sweet and savory cuisines signifies the stature of not only the bride and groom, but more so the status of their individual or collective families in society.”

A multi-day undertaking

Given that traditional Hindu weddings (the most common religion for South Asian weddings) can last for as many as seven days, it’s no surprise that a catering company can expect to provide multiple meals over multiple days.



An example of some of the offerings that can be included on a grazing table. Photo courtesy Lin and Jirsa Photography

Traditionally, a caterer can be responsible for up to four meals during a Hindu wedding: the sangeet, breakfast, lunch, and the reception.

Sangeet

The sangeet can most similarly be compared to a rehearsal dinner in western religions; it’s a time for families to gather to sing, dance, and revel in the joy of the upcoming union.

Given that the sangeet is such a celebratory and joyous occasion, the food served during the event will often be more interactive or experiential (think food displays, action stations, and in some cases a street food concept).

“It’s very social, very relaxed,” Mistry says.

Breakfast and lunch

On the day of the ceremony, a light breakfast will traditionally be served in the morning, and then a lunch (usually vegetarian) will be served following the actual ceremony. Most often, these meals are reserved for immediate family and the wedding party.

Reception

The reception will usually be a mix of hand-passed appetizers and multiple buffets featuring proteins, vegetables, rice, salads, breads, an assortment of cold condiments, and desserts.

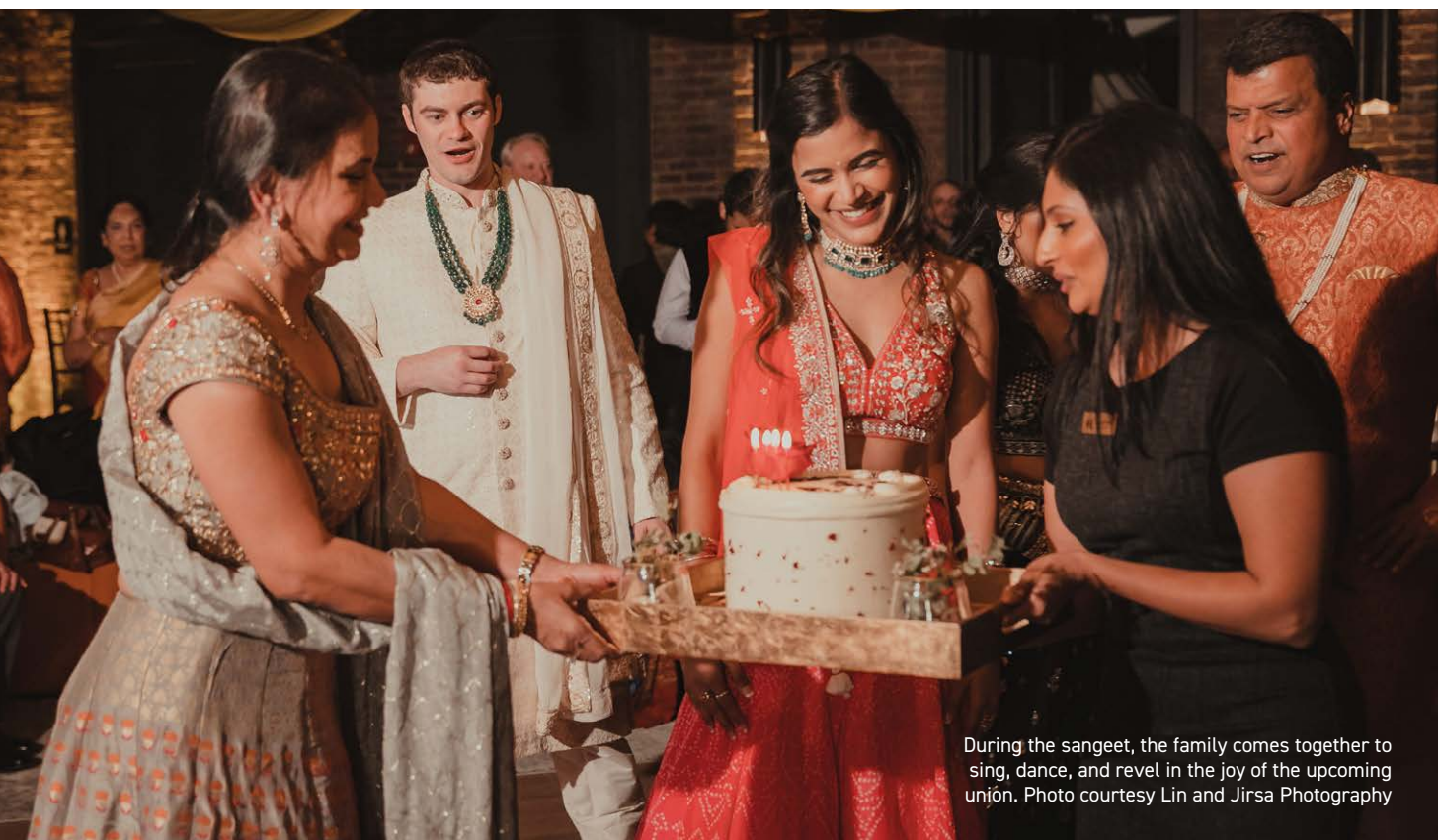
“There’s always a variety of food, so it’s very difficult to do a plated meal,” Mistry says. “You have to bring in snippets from both sides to satisfy the audience.”

The service staff for Jessie Khaira’s “7 Day Private Estate Wedding” wore aprons that matched the colors, theme, and aesthetic of the event. Photo courtesy Blush Wedding Photography





(Left) Grazing tables are popular during the sangeet as they offer opportunity to mingle with guests in a relaxed atmosphere. Photos courtesy Lin and Jirsa Photography



During the sangeet, the family comes together to sing, dance, and revel in the joy of the upcoming union. Photo courtesy Lin and Jirsa Photography



Indian weddings are milestone celebrations where often a lavish production is put forth; the plethora of food and the display of sweet and savory cuisines signifies the stature of not only the bride and groom, **but more so the status of their individual or collective families in society.** —Ruchir Mewawala (Rose Events)

Planning makes perfect

It's also important to remember that in addition to multiple days and multiple meals, caterers must also contend with multiple family members.

"The preparation of food can often take many days and weeks in advance with the culmination of various patriarchs of the family leading the assignment from menu creation to oversight of the final production of each and every sweet that gets distributed to the invitees as a parting gift," says Mewawala. "The women in the family often herald the kitchen duties and in today's modern world, attend the food tastings to ensure that the caterer has a full grasp on the expectations of both parties and their guests."

In order to successfully undertake these multi-day affairs, the key to success is planning, and the right staff (anywhere from six all the way up to 30 people depending on the size and scope of the event).

"Everything depends on the moving parts," says Mistry. "Since it's so elaborate, we want to make sure everything is done with integrity. There's a lot to absorb and a lot to factor in when you're planning a South Asian event."

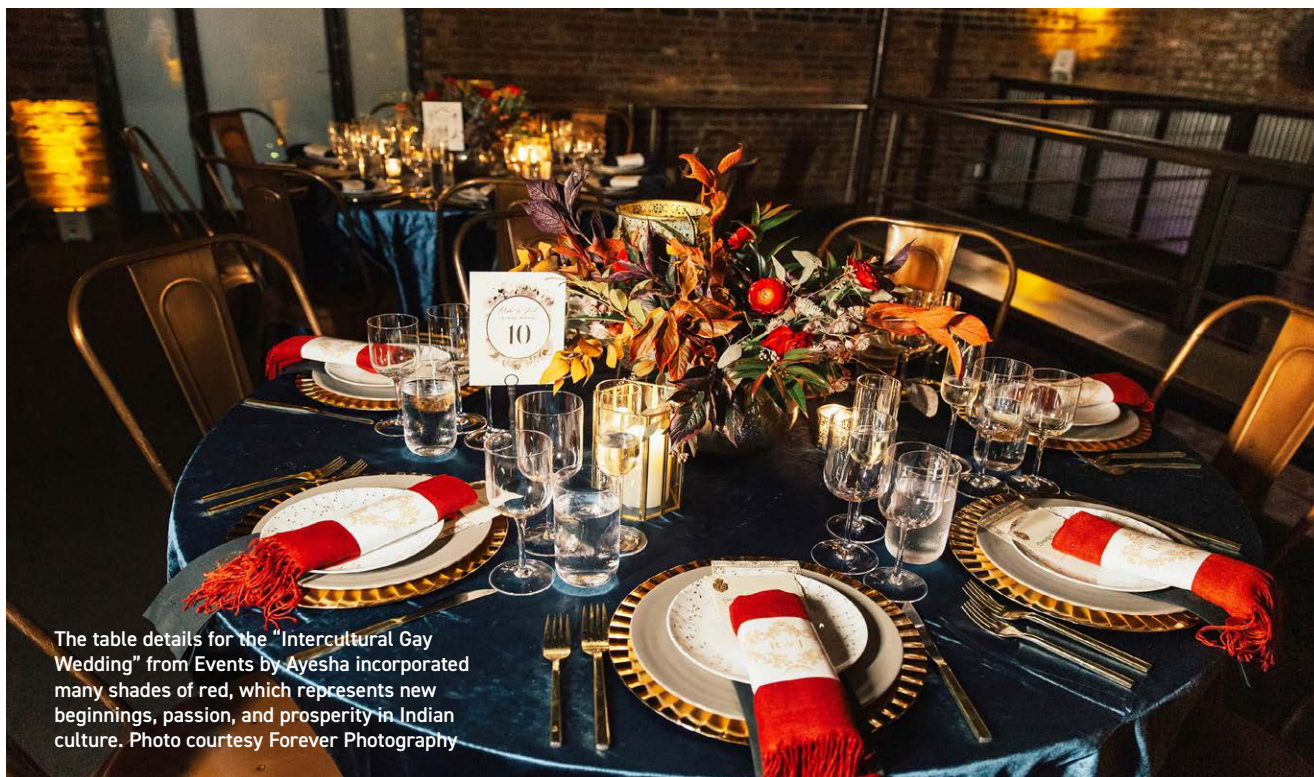
When cultures collide

The types of foods served at South Asian weddings have changed considerably over the years, whereas in the past there were very traditional ideas of what types of foods



should be served. Today's clients have adapted a more fluid idea of "tradition."

"In the past, traditional Indian wedding feasts often consisted of a variety of vegetarian dishes, as well as some non-vegetarian options such as chicken, lamb, and fish," says Keith Sarasin, the founder of Atma, a one-of-a-kind pop-up tasting experience showcasing cuisine from India.



The table details for the "Intercultural Gay Wedding" from Events by Ayesha incorporated many shades of red, which represents new beginnings, passion, and prosperity in Indian culture. Photo courtesy Forever Photography



(Above) Events by Ayesha submitted an "Intercultural Gay Wedding" to the 2022 Gala awards. Shown: the table setup and printed materials. Photo courtesy Forever Photography; (right) A Pav Bhaji (a fast food dish consisting of a thick vegetable curry served with a soft bread roll) Station. Photo courtesy Children Across Borders; (Below right) The cake for Events by Ayesha's "Intercultural Gay Wedding" was provided by Lulu's Cakery. Photo courtesy Forever Photography



"These dishes were often served in a buffet style, and were accompanied by rice, breads, and desserts.

"In recent years though, there has been a trend toward more diverse and varied menus at Indian weddings, with a greater emphasis on international cuisines and fusion dishes."

The concept of fusion at South Asian weddings can most likely be attributed to the rise in multicultural weddings that are taking place; whereas in the past couples were commonly from the same background, today's couples may be working to blend two cultures together.

"The amalgamation of two cultures and their traditional food requirements has brought in an influx of palate and fusions in the menus we now create," says Mewawala. "The gravitational shift from typical items that one would see at a traditional Indian wedding has led to an inevitable modernization which has played a role in everything from how food is displayed, when it is served, and to what a myriad of popular dishes when combined would look, taste, and showcase like."



A Big Fat Indian Wedding

Indian weddings (most commonly Hindu) are steeped richly in tradition and filled with beautiful customs and rituals, often occurring over seven to nine days.

"Indian weddings are deeply rooted in traditions, religious beliefs, and to some extent even superstitions that are passed down from one generation to the next," says Ruchir Mewawala (Rose Events). "The ultimate union of two individuals and the alliance of both of their families over the span of days and weeks of an Indian wedding means that the future generations are now deeply connected to their ancestors and beyond."

Below are the rituals traditionally included in Hindu weddings:

Lagna Patrika and Wagdaan

The formal engagement ceremony and announcement of the couple's impending marriage, featuring an exchange of written vows and rings.

Barni Band-hwana and Mayara

A ritual done 15 days before the wedding, which involves tying a thread, called mauli, to the groom and his parents' hands. Often this is then followed by mayara which is the "maternal uncle's ceremony" in which the maternal uncles of both to-be-weds shower the families with gifts and treats.

Mandvo and Pithi

A pre-wedding ceremony that involves applying turmeric paste to the couple.

Mehndi

A ceremony traditionally only attended by the bride's close female friends and family members kicks off the wedding itself. The event usually takes place one day before the nuptials. During the festivities, henna paste is used to apply intricate designs of temporary decorative art to the bride's hands and feet.

Sangeet/Garba

Prior to the actual wedding, there's a gathering where the family comes together to sing, dance, and revel in the joy of the upcoming union. Fittingly, sangeet directly translates to "sung together." Each side of the family sings a traditional folk song to welcome the other.

Baraat or Vara Yatra

The arrival of the groom and his party to the ceremony site.

Pokwanu and Tilak

Signifies the bride's family welcoming the groom. During this welcoming ceremony, tilak, which is Sanskrit for "mark," will be applied to the groom's forehead.

Kanya Aagman

During the bridal processional the to-be-wed will often enter underneath a canopy.

Ganesh Pooja or Puja

Some Hindu ceremonies begin with an invocation to Lord Ganesh, or Ganesha, the Hindu god of wisdom and salvation.

Granthibandan

During this ritual, the groom's scarf is tied to the bride's shawl while they chant prayers.

Havan and Agni

A sacred fire ritual where the couple will offer handfuls of rice, and sometimes ghee, to the fire during the wedding ceremony.

Kanyadan and Hastamelap

Kanyadan means "giving away the bride" in Sanskrit and is a symbolic ritual that takes place during Hindu wedding ceremonies. First, the bride's father will take his daughter's right hand and place it in the groom's right hand. After kanyadan, hastamelap takes place. During this, the bride's mother pours sacred water onto the couple's hands.

Jai Mala

The couple exchanges floral garlands.

Saptapadi

The couple will take seven steps around the holy fire where they will recite vows.

Mangal Sutra and Sindoor

A sacred necklace that is put on the bride. After tying the mangal sutra onto the bride, the groom will then apply sindoor, a traditional vermilion red or orange-red colored cosmetic powder, to the bride's head.

Aashirwad

The couple receives a blessing from their families at the end of the ceremony.

Vidaai

A grand exit and farewell.



Information courtesy [The Knot](#)



(Top left) Floating wedding cake; (Top) Orecchiette a la Makhani (interpretation of pasta with Indian inspired vodka sauce); (Middle) One of the ceremonies that a Hindu priest conducts during the wedding; (Above) Gold represents wealth, prosperity, and security in Indian tradition; (Left) An Indian-inspired grazing display. All photos courtesy Enmuse Photography + Cinematic

Beyond fusing the differing traditions of a multicultural couple, many couples (even those who are from the same culture) are opting for a completely different style of cuisine in the form of “globally inspired concept dishes.”

“We’re seeing Indo-Chinese where it’s Chinese food with an Indian spin such as stir fry stations that are using traditional Indian flavors or ingredients,” says Mistry. “We’re seeing Indian pastas, we’re seeing Mexican quesadilla, nacho, and taco bars with Indian spices incorporated. “A lot of couples want to create unique experiences that maybe the average guest can’t experience at a regular Indian restaurant.”

Even non-Hindu couples are starting to request traditional, globally-inspired dishes.

“I feel like I’ve been getting all the [international] requests lately,” said Jay Varga (The JDK Group) during a Chef’s Roundtable with the International Caterer’s Association last year. “People are getting more adventurous here when it’s coming to their wedding food.”

Never be inauthentic

For those caterers who may be new to the world of South Asian weddings (or who are hoping to break into the market), the task of how to approach this style of cuisine, not to mention the tradition that goes along with it, may seem like an uphill battle. Fortunately, today’s couples are more willing to concede some of the traditions in favor of a meal that is more “inspired by,” rather than authentic.

“It won’t be authentic, but it’ll be close enough,” Mistry says, “and many clients are going to be okay with that.”

For Karen O’Connor (Daniel et Daniel Catering and Event

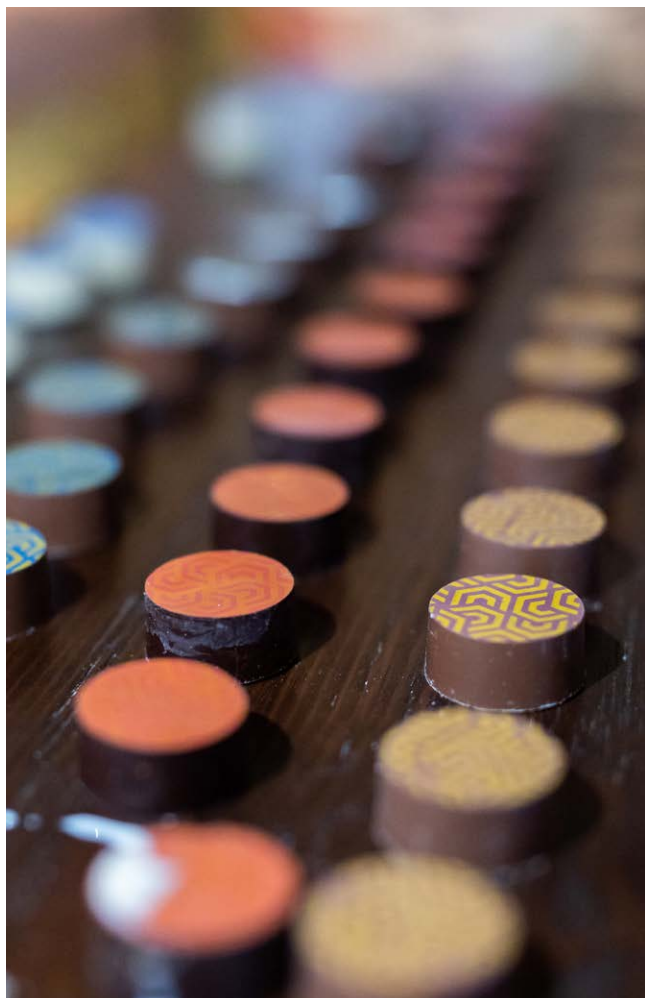
Creation), she asks a lot of questions when working with multicultural couples: “What does mom make that you want to have on the menu? Where do you want to see the influence?”

But don’t be mistaken, there’s a difference between “inauthentic” and “not authentic.”

“Instead of trying to be authentic, we try to bring the seasonings into foods,” she said during the ICA roundtable. “If I can outsource a good product, I will, but I want to be authentic, I don’t want to disrespect anyone’s customs. If they just want the flavor, I can definitely play around in the kitchen.”

Being truly “authentic” when preparing South Asian dishes may take years.

“The mastery it takes to prepare these dishes from a wedding perspective takes decades,” Sarasin says. “In India, each dish is handled by chefs who specialize in the specific dish. For example, there is a biryani chef whose singular job is to create that dish. They are typically trained for years under a guru who has spent most of their life dedicated to learning the dish.”



Orecchiette a la Makhani & Gobi Manchurian.
Photo courtesy Enmuse Photography + Cinematic

Breaking into the business

Breaking into the South Asian market may seem like a no-brainer.

“I’ve seen many caterers attempt to capitalize on the Indian wedding market, which by the way, according to many metrics is easily over \$50 billion,” says Mewawala. “It’s easy to understand why a catering company would want to address our niche market with the goal of adding to their top and bottom-line growth.

“The demand for South Asian food is so high now that almost all of the national suppliers carry some basic items in their inventory.”

Breaking into the market is easier said than done for many caterers, however. For starters, there’s a lot of education that needs to happen first before a caterer can even attempt to produce a South Asian wedding.

“There’s a lot of internal education that needs to take place,” Mistry says. “How do you serve it? How do you prepare it? There’s a lot of information you need to be up on.”

One of the best places to start when getting familiarized with the South Asian market is to tap into the industry’s knowledge.

“One of the simplest ways to break into the market is of course to hire or partner up with a trained chef from India

Henna Truffles. Photo courtesy Enmuse Photography
+ Cinematic



Gobi Manchurian (lightly battered cauliflower florets in chili soy sauce). Photo courtesy Enmuse Photography + Cinematic



A ceremony conducted by the Hindu priest. Photo courtesy Enmuse Photography + Cinematic

What's On the Menu?

Food is one of the most important parts of any wedding, and South Asian weddings are no different.

However, there are a few food items that carry with them significant religious or cultural meaning.

"Going deeper into the elements of a traditional Hindu ceremony, the use of rice, coconuts, leaves, fruits, and nuts all play a major role in showcasing the couple's ability to not only survive various steps together in their newly wedded life, but also to some extent who may dominate the household individually," says Ruchir Mewawala (Rose Events)

At most South Asian weddings, many of the following food items will often be found on the menu (in some form):

APPETIZERS

- **Samosas:** A fried South Asian pastry with a savory filling, including ingredients such as spiced potatoes, onions, and peas
- **Pakorās:** A spiced fritter consisting of such ingredients as potatoes and onions, coated in seasoned gram flour batter and deep fried
- **Chaat:** An umbrella term for a

wide range of appetizers that feature some kind of fried dough with various ingredients that typically create a spicy, tangy, or salty flavor

MAINS

- **Mutton Biryani:** Rice layered over slow cooked mutton gravy
- **Palak Paneer:** Paneer, or Indian cheese, served in a creamy, thick gravy made from spinach
- **Butter Chicken:** Similar to chicken tikka masala

BREADS

- Naan
- Roti
- Paratha

SOUPS & SAUCES

- Dal (dried, split pulses)
- Chutney
- Curry
- Kadhi (yogurt and chickpea soup)

RICE DISHES

- Jeera rice (rice and cumin seeds)
- Biryani (rice and Indian spices)
- Pulao (basmati rice with aromatic whole spices and herbs)

DESSERTS

- **Gajar Halwa:** A carrot-based sweet dessert pudding
- **Gulab Jamun:** A traditional dessert that consists of spongy milky balls soaked in rose-scented syrup

BEVERAGES

- **Masala Chai:** Made by boiling black tea in milk and water with a mixture of aromatic herbs and spices
- **Mango Lassi:** Made with fresh yogurt or curd, milk, and sweet mango slices with hints of cinnamon and/or ground cardamom

"It's worth noting that the specific menu items vary greatly depending on regional and personal preferences, and some families may choose to include both vegetarian and non-vegetarian options," says Keith Sarasin (Atma). "Overall, the traditional menu items served at Indian weddings are a reflection of the country's rich culinary history and cultural traditions but differ greatly depending on the region and religion."

or someone who resides locally in the market where your catering business is already successful,” says Mewawala. “One thing that goes a long way is onboarding someone directly of South Asian descent into your team to be the face of any events you cater, as this person ideally would be better familiar with the terminology, ingredients, and requirements of any potential client hosting an Indian wedding.

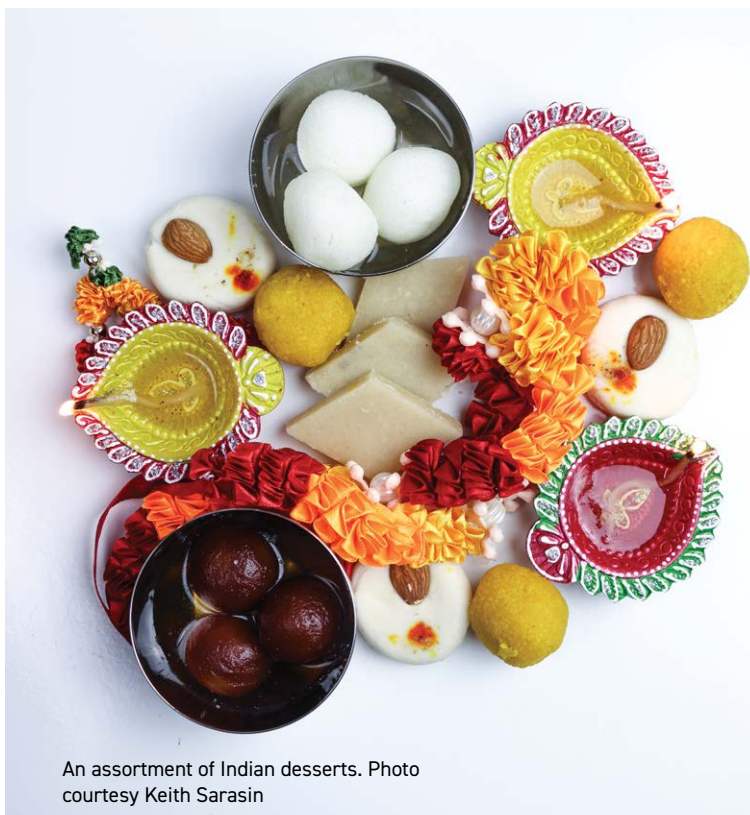
“Or, one of the smartest ways to break into the market is to conduct a series of food tastings with trusted members of the South Asian community who can provide feedback and criticism before your menu is presented to an actual or potential client. Once you have reached a level that is presentable far beyond the typical samosas and cutlets or similar ready-made items that are prepared or pre-packaged by your local food distributor, you will turn the corner when your team is able to create entrées and curries from scratch.”



With that, are you ready to break into the South Asian wedding market?

“They are elaborate, they are fantastic, they are great for your portfolio, but you have to be educated at the same time to be successful at it,” Mistry says. “After a few trial runs, you’ll understand it better; you just need to have a starting point.” **CS**

Shown: Chole with burnt onion stock, ghee roasted tomatoes, and sourdough naan. Photo courtesy Jenn Bakos Photography



An assortment of Indian desserts. Photo courtesy Keith Sarasin

More to Learn

Want to learn more about South Asian weddings and Indian cuisine? Don't miss either of these sessions, taking place during Catersource + The Special Event (March 27–30 in Orlando, FL)

- **Planning South Asian Weddings** presented by **Rajan Mistry** on Tuesday, March 28th at 11:15 a.m.
- **Misconceptions & History: An Exploration of Indian Cuisine**, presented by **Chef Keith Sarasin** on Wednesday, March 29th at 2:30 p.m.

More information can be found at <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/>

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Little Nibbles of What You'll Experience at The Art of Catering Food 2023

“Come with an open mind and a hungry belly”

—Jason Sutton,
Footers Catering

(Above) Art of Catering Food will take place March 26-27 at the Orange County Convention Center. All photos courtesy Catersource and Art of Catering Food

Don't miss the ICA during Catersource Conference & Tradeshow

Stop by the ICA Inspiration Zone during Catersource Conference & Tradeshow 2023 to join friends, peers, and colleagues.

Catersource + The Special Event

is always a highlight of the year for many of us in the catering industry. But the 2023 event is going to be extra energizing. Why? Because we're finally welcoming Art of Catering Food (AOCF) back to the table after a three-year hiatus to lead into the conference.

This signature program served up by the International Caterers Association and Catersource teams is the spot to spark ideas for how to innovate your kitchen. AOCF is taking over the Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, FL from March 26-27, flowing right into Catersource + The Special Event (March 27-30).

It's a week of boundless education and inspiration, tours and toasts, and unrivaled networking opportunities. Today, we're sharing little nibbles of what you can expect!

Immerse yourself in Art of Catering Food



In the catering world, there's no event quite like AOCF (and that's according to the attendees, not us).

As an event designed for chefs—and taught by chefs—it cultivates an intimate environment for chefs to learn, collaborate, troubleshoot, and connect unlike any other. That's what keeps **Jason Sutton of Footers Catering** coming back year after year. In fact, “The connections I made at my first AOCF in Salt Lake City have been lifelong and the reason I am so ingrained in this community.”

Anyone who has an interest in the culinary side of the catering business will benefit from the immense opportunities available on-site over this two-day program.



Focused through the lens of the catering chef, Art of Catering Food is a boutique event designed for chefs, and taught by chefs. It cultivates an intimate environment for chefs to learn, collaborate, troubleshoot, and connect unlike any other.



Karen O'Connor, executive chef at Daniel et Daniel Catering and Event Creation, shared, “It is not just about food. There are lots of tips and tricks about the logistics of being a catering chef, different ways to plate, setting up kitchens in empty fields, how to work out of a closet, and on and on. The things you will learn and the contacts you will make will be invaluable.”



Jay Varga, executive chef at The JDK Group and long-time attendee and speaker this year, added in, “The other benefit that sometimes isn’t the primary focus is the networking you get to do. You meet so many amazing and talented people who just want to learn and share that you form relationships and connections that continue to provide inspiration and help long after the conference is over. To me, that is priceless.”

AOCF conference sessions to savor

Wondering what you can expect? Here’s a small taste of just a few of the sessions taking the stage at AOCF this year:

Keynote by Chef Yia Vang



James Beard nominee, *Eater*’s “Chef of the Year,” Netflix’s *Iron Chef: Quest for a Legend* participant—the list of recent accomplishments goes on and on for **Chef Yia Vang**. His signature restaurant, Union Hmong Kitchen, is a staple at the Graze Food Hall in North Loop Minneapolis. But this year, he’ll be opening Vinai, a brick-and-mortar location dedicated to the past, present, and future of Hmong cooking—the ultimate ode to his heritage.

Hear more about his story and the Hmong flavors that have informed his work and won him recent chef stardom and industry-wide respect. After, enjoy a tasting and meet and greet! Turn to page 44 for a taste of what to expect.

Culinary Tour: Puff ‘n Stuff Catering Orlando

Not all sessions take place in the classroom at AOCF, which is part of the appeal.

Puff ‘n Stuff Catering, an award-winning Orlando member of the Leading Caterers of America, is opening the doors to their kitchen for all to see. Learn about how they operate and pick up tips along the way.



Art of Catering Food is back after a three-year hiatus!

Are you ready to be inspired?

Experience Art of Catering Food, an event designed for chefs, and taught by chefs, March 26-27 in Orlando, FL. Over the course of two days leading into Catersource + The Special Event, you'll connect with experienced catering chefs who will be sharing new culinary techniques, the latest trending ingredients, food costing, and everything else you need to turn your menus into works of art.

Whether you are looking for ways to enhance your operations or want to liaise with, learn from, and see what catering chefs around the country are doing to appeal to new clients, Art of Catering Food has something for you!

Find all the details at <https://informaconnect.com/art-of-catering-food/>



Lunch & Learn—Tacos: Deconstructed, Reimagined and Elevated for Wow Experiences! (Roy Porter, Keyon Hammond, Phuoc Vo, Paul Buchanan)

Hands-on learning that involves tacos? Yes please! Explore the evolution of tacos with moderator **Roy Porter** and three executive chefs, while also constructing your own masterpieces for a mid-day nibble.



Zero Waste Prep: Designing a Menu to Maximize Time & Profit (Mark Ellis)

We're navigating a different landscape than ever before with post-COVID demand, insane inflation issues, supply chain struggles, labor shortages, and more. How do you ensure that while dealing with all this, you're still turning a profit? **Mark Ellis of The Chef's Table** will share tips, tricks, and strategies for a menu that will prove profitable despite current challenges.

The culinary learning continues at Catersource + The Special Event

If AOCF wasn't enough learning for you, stay for Catersource + The Special Event and get more culinary tips and tricks during these sessions from our all-star ICA chefs.

Session: Culinary Theatrics: How to Get the Most Action Out of Your Station

Date: Tuesday, March 28th

Time: 11:15 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Speakers: Jason Sutton (Director of Operations, Footers Catering), Jay Varga (Executive Chef, The JDK Group), and Andy Krause (Executive Chef, Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park)

From a gourmet 16-foot-long charcuterie board built on a rustic farmhouse table with butchers' paper and porcelain menu signs to a children's slide that actually delivers sliders, come see what's possible when you let your culinary mind explore outside of the box.

Session: Building Your Culinary Depth Chart

Date: Wednesday, March 29th

Time: 2:30 p.m. - 3:15 p.m.

Speakers: Jason Sutton (Footers Catering) and Jay Varga (The JDK Group)

Catering companies are not unlike any other major restaurant or hotel operation that needs clear and



defined roles for their culinary department. Over the past nine years at each of their respective companies, Jason and Jay have molded their culinary teams to the high-functioning teams they are today. Come listen to how they recruit and onboard.

Do you have your passes for Orlando yet?

As you can see, the program will be a mix of tasty delights, tangible tips, and a whole lot of opportunities to meet those you admire in the industry. We're excited; are you?

There's still time to purchase your conference passes for AOCF and Catersource + The Special Event this year! Don't throw out the opportunity to share a taste of the future of catering with some of the world's best chefs, caterers, and vendors.

A pro tip from Sutton: "Come with an open mind and a hungry belly."

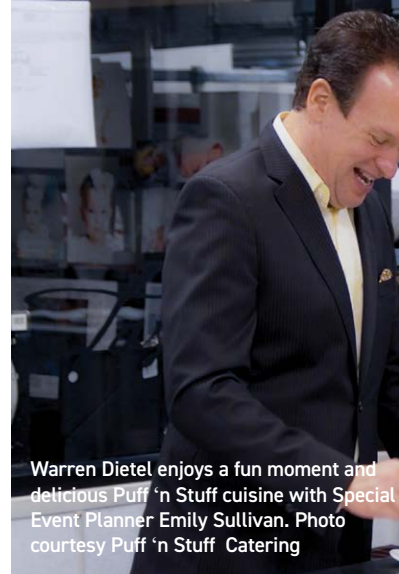
Visit the [CS+SE website](#) to snag your journey to catering innovation now. We'll see you soon, friends. 

(Left three images) All the hallmarks of Art of Catering Food are in place: the quick burst Round Robins that keep attendees moving, tasting, and learning; the short chef-driven sessions that focus on technique, problem solving, and unique ideas; the tasty Lunch & Learn that pairs high culinary concepts with a solid learning experience plus networking; a venue tour; and finally, a captivating keynote.

Footers Catering, Daniel et Daniel Catering and Event Creation, The JDK Group, Engage Works Inc., the Chef's Table, and the Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park are all proud members of the ICA. For more information on how to join the ICA and to be notified of future catering industry webinars, events, and education opportunities, **visit internationalcaterers.org.**



Warren Dietel, CEO and Owner of Puff 'n Stuff Catering, has worked in the catering and events industry since the late 1980s, and is this year's Michael Roman Lifetime Achievement award recipient. Photo courtesy Puff 'n Stuff Catering



Warren Dietel enjoys a fun moment and delicious Puff 'n Stuff cuisine with Special Event Planner Emily Sullivan. Photo courtesy Puff 'n Stuff Catering



What Would *Q*

Puff 'n Stuff Catering's **Warren Dietel** is this year's recipient of the **Michael Roman Lifetime Achievement award**

BY AMBER KISPERT



In 2017, Puff 'n Stuff Catering opened its doors to the Leading Caterers of America. This year, attendees of Art of Catering Food will have that honor. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



Three generations of Dietels: Warren with his son Tanner, and parents Susie and Glenn. Photo courtesy Puff 'n Stuff Catering

Warren Do?

You might say Warren Dietel (CEO and owner of Puff 'n Stuff Catering) knows his way around the catering business. Not only has he worked in the industry since the late 1980s, but he also spent his formative years watching his parents create, manage, and grow the business.

"I'm an extremely social person; I love entertaining, and enjoy playing a leading role in a party," he says. "I also love spending time at home with my wife, son, and

extended family, but the idea of gathering in small and large groups fuels my happiness."

When Dietel purchased the business from his parents in 2003, he hit the ground running.

"It's never been easy, but through the difficult times learning always emerges," he says. "I wasn't sure we would make it through the first summer, but our small team pulled together and survived.

"The ebbs and flows of business have been scary and exciting, usually at the same time, but overall, it's been a fun ride."



“Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would expand into wholesale manufacturing or commercial real estate. I enjoy the thrill of catering, and I wanted to throw parties.

—Warren Dietel

Now 20 years later, although Dietel is stepping back a bit from the day-to-day, he is still inspiring a new generation of committed team members (led by its new president Tracy Vessillo); and he is still the man his team looks to solve any problem (even if he's not physically around).

“After being away for several months, one of Puff 'n Stuff's senior planners shared with me the details of several challenging and busy periods,” says Dietel. “She said the team would take a breath, stand back, and ask ‘What would Warren do? How would Warren handle this?’ That was one of the greatest compliments I've ever received.”

Obviously Dietel did something right; he is this year's recipient of the Michael Roman Lifetime

Achievement award, which will be bestowed on March 30th in Orlando, FL (Dietel's hometown) during Catersource + The Special Event.

“It brought tears to my eyes,” Dietel says of finding out that he was this year's recipient. “To have been honored in Michael Roman's name is indeed an honor. Michael was such an inspiration to us all and his legacy and teachings endure. I attended one of Mike's early conferences with my mom in the late 80s and made a friend that lasted decades. He is missed and I am grateful to accept this recognition in his name.”

Dietel's team over at Puff 'n Stuff is absolutely thrilled that Dietel is being recognized for his many contributions to the industry, and those who are lucky enough to find themselves in his presence.

“He has always been a person that you admire, no matter what position you may be in,” says Heidi Dietel Brice, director of sales at Puff 'n Stuff. “He is the definition of a true visionary—creating an idea, making it come to life, then figuring out how we can do it even better the next time. He always has a smile on his face and exerts energy that is contagious.

“He sets standards high for everyone on our team, but in a really special, unique way that forces our team to do their very best to exceed his expectations. He has touched so many people, companies, made so many special friendships, and continues to be a pillar to our industry.”

Lauren Baldan, Puff 'n Stuff's director of catering, shares similar sentiments.

“My favorite thing about Warren is what a visionary he is and how he continues to push us all forward,” she says. “His passion for this industry, his people, our clients, our work is unimaginable. He makes us all want to be better and do better. I have never met a better motivator.”

From his parents' house to the house of mouse

Dietel's career hasn't been all Puff 'n Stuff (although he did begin work there in 1989); he opened his first business (auto detailing) at the age of 16 in his parents' driveway, before taking a job at Walt Disney World® Resort in 1984 in its weddings business, which led to the Disney Institute in 2001.

“I've always kind of been an entrepreneur at heart, and it's always been in my soul from early on,” he says. “Disney was epic and was eye opening. It inspired me to imagine what the world could be, it helped me realize how big it really is, and how fascinating it is.

“In the six years I spent at Disney, I had two of the most interesting jobs there ever were: I traveled all over the world, all over the country representing one of the most iconic brands in the world, dealing with the most fascinating people, and

(Facing page, clockwise) Warren Dietel attributes much of his success to his team. Pictured: Executive Chef Sean Holden preps for a dinner (roasted berbere spiced duck, yams, and autumn vegetables) with the International Caterers Association; The Puff 'n Stuff team in action at an event at the Dr. Phillips Center for Performing Arts. Photos courtesy Puff 'n Stuff Catering

(Left) Warren Dietel welcomes Rosen College of Hospitality Management's Camp Pineapple to the Puff 'n Stuff facility in 2018. Photo courtesy @rosencollege

Puff 'n Stuff Catering's Warren Dietel



(Above) From left to right: Jonathan Jennings, Warren Dietel, Tanner Dietel, and Georg Broich during the Leading Caterers of America Executive Summit. Photo courtesy Puff 'n Stuff Catering

(Top right) Raspberry S'more with dark chocolate cream, raspberry compote, and 'mallow. Photo courtesy Puff 'n Stuff Catering

(Right) Pan roasted salmon, herbed orzo, fennel slaw with Florida citrus. Photo courtesy Puff 'n Stuff Catering

(Bottom right) Root vegetable crusted Florida grouper, goat cheese potato purée, charred orange and caper vinaigrette, broccolini. Photo courtesy Puff 'n Stuff Catering



putting together so many great things—it was absolutely formative and mind-blowing.”

After Disney, Dietel went to work at Scott Kay Platinum managing the southern U.S.

“Jewelry wasn’t for me, but I watched closely and absorbed everything I could during my brief tenure,” he says.

Dietel eventually made his way back to Puff 'n Stuff.

“I respect and appreciate the business my mom and dad built—it was fantastic, and they built an incredible reputation, providing the perfect launching point,” he says.

“I was able to combine the learning experiences, put them together, and propel the business.”

In 2006, Dietel moved Puff 'n Stuff’s operations into a purpose-built production facility, and in 2010 Puff 'n Stuff expanded to the west coast by joining forces with a leading Tampa caterer. Additional commercial real estate ventures, including a couple of Orlando’s most

popular venues (The MEZZ and The Balcony), followed.

“Warren has been an inspiration for me personally for what he has done with a second-generation family business,” says Anthony Lambatos with Footers Catering, a frequent attendee to Dietel’s educational seminars. “As someone who also owns a business started by my parents, I know how difficult that transition can be. To see him take a small company and turn it into one of the nation’s largest and most respected catering companies is remarkable. His business acumen is second to none, and I’ve always admired his tenacity and ambition in growing his business.”

In 2014, Dietel opened Chef’s Commissary, a wholesale food manufacturer, and then in 2015 a second production facility for Puff ‘n Stuff was opened in Tampa.

“Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would expand into wholesale manufacturing or commercial real estate,” Dietel says. “I enjoy the thrill of catering, and I wanted to throw parties. Now, the enterprise has grown, and I enjoy cheering my team on to endless successes.”

“Warren Dietel has helped change the face of the catering industry in the highly competitive Florida market,” says Carl Sacks, Executive Director for the Leading Caterers of America. “Since taking over the company from

his parents who founded the business, his visionary leadership has allowed the company to grow from a regional central Florida caterer, to what is now likely the largest independent caterer in the state.”

The business-minded caterer

Having worked in the catering business for so many years, one may think that catering is in Dietel’s soul, that it’s in his blood. While it may be to some extent (thanks to his parents), Dietel however considers himself both a businessman and a caterer.

“I’m built differently,” he says. “I enjoy the act of being a caterer, but



Puff 'n Stuff Catering (a member of the Leading Caterers of America) is a premier full-service catering and events company. Catering to affairs of all sizes, their award-winning team produces a variety of cuisines and exciting, unforgettable experiences. Photo courtesy Puff 'n Stuff Catering

Puff 'n Stuff Catering's Warren Dietel

the business side of the catering business is what gets me up in the morning. I enjoy watching it all come together, seeing it, and being proud of our accomplishments. It's like an orchestra performing in perfect harmony—all the elements converging on a space over several hours—it's magic, and it isn't possible without dedicated teams and amazing vendor partners."

Dietel says he attributes his success in the industry to his tenacity

and work ethic, and he will do everything he can to avoid taking 'no' for an answer.

"I learned these valuable lessons watching my mom toil in the kitchen for 10 plus hours, then head out to the event site to make it happen. Caterers are extraordinary people!"

When it comes to who inspires him, Dietel looks to "mavericks, the people that do things that defy the

odds and think differently" because that's how he lives his life.

"I bet everything on Puff 'n Stuff, and I bet on me," he says. "If you're wise, save, and dedicate a portion of your profits to growth, you improve your chances for success. You must reinvest in yourself, there's no better reinvestment than in yourself, and there's no telling where it can go. Off premise catering has limitless boundaries."



This year's Catesource + The Special Event Leadership Award recipients will be recognized during the annual Awards Ceremony (rather than the Leadership Lunch), which will be held Thursday, March 30th on the Keynote Stage. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

It's Time to Celebrate

Join us in celebrating this year's Leadership Award recipients at our annual Awards Ceremony on Thursday, March 30th at 5:30 p.m. on the Keynote Stage. A nominee reception will be held from 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. in the Orange County Convention Center Lobby.

Considered by many to be the Oscars night of the events and catering industry, during the Awards Ceremony the ACE, Gala, and CATIE awards are bestowed upon the best of the best in our industry. Cheer on the nominees

and applaud award recipients as they take the stage to accept our industry's highest honors! With a kickoff keynote by Michael Cerbelli and lifetime achievement and volunteerism awards added to this event, this will be an unforgettable evening.

Congratulations to this year's winners and we look forward to celebrating with everyone this March!

More information can be found at informaconnect.com/catesource-thespecialevent/awards-ceremony/

The greatest fight of his life

Like everyone in the catering industry, the COVID-19 pandemic hit Puff 'n Stuff hard and Dietel is grateful to be on the other side.

“The pandemic was the perfect storm—both our immediate business and pipeline evaporated in a matter of days,” he says. “I am grateful for the small group that stuck with us, and we pulled together like never before, serving our community and clawing our way back.”

“The pandemic was horrific, but we made it, we’re here, and I thought that was going to be the worst thing that I would have to go through, but it was only preparing me for the biggest fight of my life.”

On November 21st, 2021, Dietel awoke in the morning the Sunday before Thanksgiving with neck pain and swelling. Following a trip to the emergency room, he heard the news: he had Metastatic Lymphoma which was eventually diagnosed as Stage 4: Diffuse Large B Cell Lymphoma.

“The experience was, and still is, surreal,” Dietel says.

Following several months of chemotherapy, Dietel was encouraged to go live his life, which he did, however in August of 2022 he learned the news that everyone feared: the cancer had returned. A new, and more intense treatment protocol called CAR T cell therapy became his focus.

“It’s devastating,” he says. “Cancer tries to take everything. It takes your hair, it takes your dignity, it takes your strength, but only you can control your spirit. I believe my positive outlook, the incredible support I received from my wife, our son, extended family, friends, and our industry helped me rise daily with a zeal for life. I refuse to give in to this horrific disease!”



“Now, I’m focused on living my best life,” he says. “It includes a bit less catering to others and more time with those I love. The moments and the time together mean more than it ever has.”

(Above) Warren Dietel with his wife Melissa, and son Tanner during a trip to New Smyrna Beach. Photo courtesy Warren Dietel

His next chapter

Although Dietel is prevented from engaging in Puff 'n Stuff as much as he would like, it’s not stopping him from engaging with the catering industry. For starters, he’s still learning from those around him.

“I continue to learn, absorb, and listen. There are lessons everywhere,” he says. “I think one of life’s greatest lessons is to always be a sponge.”

Additionally, Dietel is always eager to share his knowledge with those around him.

“It’s my time to give,” he says. “I’m an open book, I put it all out there, and I like to share the things that I’ve learned.”

No one is more appreciative of Dietel’s willingness to share than Lambatos.

Puff 'n Stuff Catering's Warren Dietel

"He cares about helping the people around him to be better, and is selfless in sharing his knowledge," he says.

Although Dietel's next chapter still needs to be written, he has every intention of living his life to the fullest.

"There's no telling what tomorrow will bring, who knows how long any of us have?" he says. "My lesson through all of this is to live every day fully and be grateful for it; be grateful for the struggles, be grateful for the great times, and be grateful for the bad times. I've always

enjoyed the nectar of life, but now even more so—it's sweeter than it's ever been."

Fortunately for the catering industry though, Dietel's team at Puff 'n Stuff is fully prepared for the task of following in his footsteps.

"Pour your energy into being the best you can be, and always be kind," he says. "I hope to continue inspiring my team, providing the tools and support they need to take Puff 'n Stuff to unrealized levels of success. I'm excited to see the Puff 'n

Stuff team take the experiences we've had together and live the message of 'What would Warren do?'

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Get a Peek Inside Puff 'n Stuff

Puff 'n Stuff Events & Catering will open its doors to attendees of Art of Catering Food on March 27th. Photos courtesy Puff 'n Stuff Events & Catering

Puff 'n Stuff Catering, an award-winning Orlando member of the Leading Caterers of America, will open its facility to attendees of this year's Art of Catering Food. Explore and learn from the Puff 'n Stuff team: efficiencies, cuisine, storage, and more. Surprises are in store; transportation to-and-from is provided. This is a terrific opportunity to look at how a premier catering operation runs. More information can be found at <https://informaconnect.com/art-of-catering-food/>



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Employee Motivation Strategies for Managers

Employee motivation is the key to any successful business. It's a manager's job to keep employees energized, engaged, and eager to come into work every day. When done correctly, motivation can lead to increased productivity and greater job satisfaction among your team. But what strategies should you use? Let's take a look at some of the most effective ways to motivate your employees.

1. Celebrate successes

Give recognition for a job well done and celebrate successes, big or small. Whether it's a team-wide high five or throwing an office party when goals are met, affirming hard work gives employees something to strive for and makes them feel appreciated.

2. Give autonomy

Letting employees take control of their own projects not only allows them to learn more but can also boost their confidence and motivation. If you trust your team to make decisions and give them the freedom to do so, it will help create an environment of collaboration and innovation.

3. Foster positive competition

There's nothing wrong with healthy competition between employees! Set up reward systems for tasks completed or goals achieved and let people

compete positively. One of my favorites is when an event books, the salesperson rings a large bell. Seeing others around succeed can be inspiring, especially if there are tangible rewards involved!

4. Get creative

Motivation doesn't always have to come from within—try out fun team-building activities or introduce new ideas into the workplace that can keep employees engaged and excited about their work. From brainstorming sessions to taking breaks outdoors together, get creative with ways to keep motivation high in the workplace.

5. Listen and learn

It's essential to listen to your employees and find out what motivates them. Ask them questions and get feedback on how you can create an atmosphere that encourages motivation every day. In this way, you can tailor strategies according to your team's needs.

“If you trust your team to make decisions and give them the freedom to do so, it will help create an environment of collaboration and innovation.”

6. Offer feedback

Regularly share your feedback with employees. Take the time to provide positive reinforcement and constructive criticism as needed—both will help keep team morale up and encourage employees to stay motivated on their work.

7. Set clear goals

Goals are a great way to motivate employees, but they need to be realistic and attainable. Give each employee specific objectives and the resources they need to complete those tasks. When they reach those goals, reward them with something meaningful that shows you appreciate their hard work!

8. Have fun in the workplace

It's no secret that having fun can boost motivation levels! Encourage your employees to take part in activities such as lunchtime trivia games or team-building exercises throughout the year.

9. Show recognition

Everyone likes to feel appreciated, and acknowledging employees' successes is a great way to keep them motivated. A simple “thank you” or pat on the back can go a long way in encouraging your team to stay focused and driven.

10. Offer incentives

Incentives are an effective motivation tool, whether they come in the form of financial rewards or something

else like time off work or additional training opportunities. Different people are motivated by different things, so make sure that your incentive is tailored to everyone.

11. Be flexible

Flexible working arrangements allow employees to balance their personal lives with their professional commitments more easily, which can lead to increased job satisfaction and motivation at work. Consider offering flexible working hours, remote work options, and alternative leave arrangements to your team.

12. Lead by example

As a manager, you set the tone for employee motivation and productivity so make sure you lead by example! Show up early, take the initiative on projects, and stay positive even when things don't go as planned. This kind of attitude will trickle down through your team and help keep morale high throughout the workday. 

See Meryl Snow LIVE!

You can see **Meryl Snow** live and in-person at Catersource + The Special Event, March 27-30 in Orlando, FL during the following sessions:

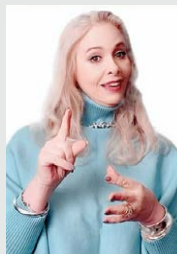
Increase Your Closing Ratio, Tuesday, March 28th at 8:30 a.m.

Selling Painkillers: How to Identify a Customer's Pain Points & Present Solutions, Tuesday, March 28th at 11:15 a.m.

Proactive Not Reactive: 6 Steps to Bring in NEW Business NOW, Tuesday, March 28th at 1:15 p.m.

16 Things Buyers Really Want from a Salesperson, Wednesday, March 29th at 1:00 p.m.

Visit <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent> for all the details



With 30 years of experience owning event planning, high-end catering, and design and décor companies, Meryl Snow is on a mission to help businesses get on their own path to success. As a Senior Consultant for **Certified Catering Consultants** and a Senior Consultant & Sales Trainer for **SnowStorm Solutions**, Meryl travels throughout North America training clients in the areas of sales, marketing, design, and branding. As a valued industry speaker, she speaks with groups from the heart with warmth and knowledge, and covers the funny side of life and business.

AS SEEN IN CINCINNATI

Three venues, three nights, and not just any guest list. Funky's Catering Events (soon to be DelightMore) hosted the Leading Caterers of America Executive Summit, a prestigious group of some of the top companies in catering and events, in November 2022.

From the first night, a reception at the Cincinnati Reds Hall of Fame, to the second night at Transept—once a German gothic church, now an unforgettable four-story event venue—to a final night of celestial Cincinnati panoramas combined with impeccable cuisine at The View, it was a whirlwind of exceptional gastronomy in extraordinary venues. Here's a look.

—Kathleen Stoehr

(Top right)
Cute baseball-themed centerpieces set upon tiny pieces of Astroturf dotted highboys on tables set within the Hall of Fame museum area. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr

(Bottom right)
Fruit, cheese, and charcuterie tables were refreshed often during the two-hour event. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr



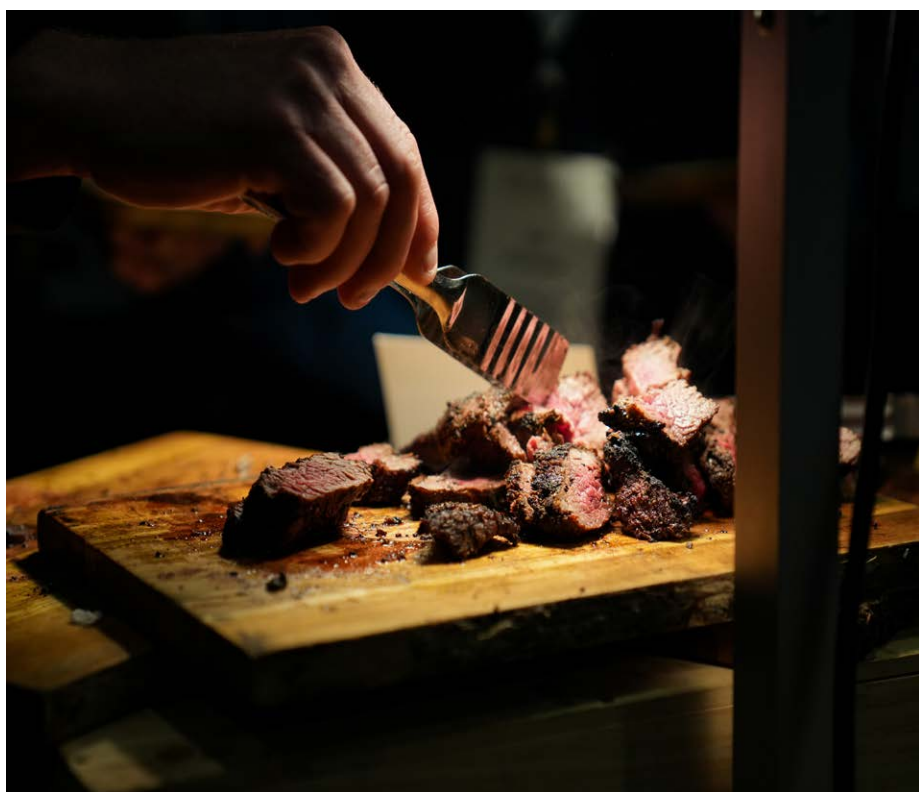
The Reds

A casual welcome reception at the Cincinnati Reds Hall of Fame offered an open bar, passed appetizers, and fruit, cheese, and charcuterie spread. The Hall of Fame was beautifully executed, and the company and light appetizers delightful.



Transept

At Transept, nestled on the OTR neighborhood, the theme was Renaissance – Art of a Different Palette. Small plates divided into stations, plus local bee flight tasting, and cocktails on every floor.



in a corner in
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late. The food:
mongst six
rs, a bourbon
tails at bars on

(Clockwise from top left) The “Porkopolis” station, including Vonderhaar’s roasted whole pig, was the centerpiece of the Assembly Room, where congregants once gathered long ago for Sunday service. | In the basement commissary, meat and potato bites featuring Angus Beef New York Strip, American Wagyu Beef Tenderloin, and twice baked potatoes with house made steak sauce were flanked by a “Garden Art” station to the right and a raw station to the left. | Be-wigged, costumed beauties welcomed guests and mingled amongst them, adding to the fun of the event. All photos courtesy Shae Huth (Gameday) and the caterer



The View

With a 25-foot ceiling, incredible crystal chandelier, 18-foot bar, and natural parquet flooring, one might think that food would take second place to the venue. Not so! It was a three-course plated meal to impress, with passed appetizers to begin, and wine pairings throughout that delighted with their surprising companionship. 

(Clockwise from top left) Cured egg yolk petite scotch egg passed appetizer. | House lox, quick pickled cucumber, pink peppercorn spread passed on spoons. | Funky's Event manager Denise Higgins passed a delicious Sakura Farms Wagyu slider with Amish cheddar with tomato jam and pea shoots | Red and gold tablescapes with lush florals befitted the guests' elevated attire. | It's inevitable. Caterers can't help but step in and help out. Here, Jonathan Jennings of CT Wedding Group—a guest no less!—helps pour one of the wine courses. | Duck confit rilette on rustic French baguette with Rohn black currant relish passed appetizer. All photos courtesy Shae Huth (Gameday) and the caterer

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STEAL THIS



Fresh ideas to use or adapt at your next event.

Serving Vessels that Surprise

Catering and novelty have always gone hand-in-hand—novel menu ideas, novel food displays, and one of the easiest (and maybe one of the most memorable or impactful) are novel serving vessels.

The miniature martini glasses and charcuterie cones have had their moment, but caterers today are looking for even more whimsical and outside-the-box thinking for showstopping bites and cocktails. Get inspired with these serving vessels that surprise for your next event. —*Amber Kispert*



Hart to Hart (gin, pineapple rum, raspberry, Falernum, sparkling rosé, and bitters) served in a glass heart | Canon (Seattle, WA)
Photo courtesy Jamie Boudreau



Homestyle meatloaf, mashed potatoes, peas, and carrots served in Hungry Man inspired foil containers | Marcia Selden Catering & Events (Stamford, CT)
Photo courtesy Marcia Selden Catering & Events



Cup O' Noodles | 24 Carrots Catering & Events (Costa Mesa, CA)
Photo courtesy Villa Visuals

Mini Skillet Paella | 24 Carrots Catering & Events (Costa Mesa, CA)
Photo courtesy Jodi Sasaki



Mini
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Goat's M
24 Carro
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**Sourdough English
muffin with crushed
avocado and rainbow
micro flower, served
on miniature chairs |
24 Carrots Catering &
Events (Costa Mesa, CA)
Photo courtesy
Katie Pritchard**



**Pot of Gold Mac n Cheese served in
miniature cauldrons | 24 Carrots
Catering & Events (Costa Mesa, CA)
Photo courtesy Villa Visuals**



**Milk Panna Cotta served in a wine glass |
24 Carrots Catering & Events (Costa Mesa, CA)
Photo courtesy Brett Hickman**



**Savory egg custard with truffle
caviar served in a broken
eggshell | 24 Carrots Catering
& Events (Costa Mesa, CA)
Photo courtesy Villa Visuals**



(Above) **Burrata served on a plate featuring a fork slot** | Pinch Food Design (New York, NY)
Photo courtesy Pinch Food Design



(Above) **Magic Mushroom** (Plantation dark, yuzu, Peychaud's aperitivo, myrtle berry, lion's mane, shiitake, and citrus) served in a mushroom-shaped glass | Canon (Seattle, WA)
Photo courtesy Jamie Boudreau



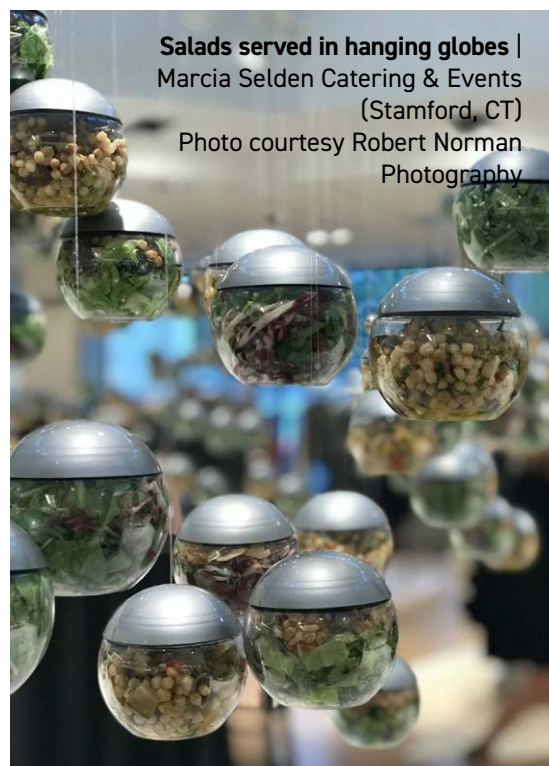
Cocktails served in a lightbulb | Blue Elephant Catering & Events (Saco, ME)
Photo courtesy Blue Elephant Catering & Events



Cocktails served in *Star Wars* themed glasses | Canon (Seattle)
Photo courtesy Jamie Boudreau



Miniature pan | Feastivities Events (Philadelphia, PA)
Photo courtesy Feastivities Events



Salads served in hanging globes | Marcia Selden Catering & Events (Stamford, CT)
Photo courtesy Robert Norman Photography



(Left) **The Canon** (re-barreled cask strength Maker's Mark, floral liqueur, bitter-sweet amaro, and blueberry-thyme shrub) served in a miniature canon | Canon (Seattle, WA)
Photo courtesy Jamie Boudreau

Miniature fry baskets | Feastivities Events (Philadelphia, PA)
Photo courtesy Leslie Gilbert



(Above) **Soup and breadsticks served in miniature Campbell's soup cans** | Constellation Culinary Group (Philadelphia, PA)
Photo courtesy Constellation Culinary Group



By Chef Jay Varga



Editor's note: Jay Varga is the President of the International Caterers Association's Culinary Council, which helps to present **Art of Catering Food**.

Art of Catering Food: For Chefs, By Chefs

With Art of Catering Food (AOCF) fast approaching, I think about the first one I ever attended. It was back in 2016 in Washington D.C., and I was a little over a year into my position as executive chef with The JDK Group. I honestly had never heard of the conference, but I was told we were going, and it would be a great experience. I was excited! I saw it as an opportunity to travel, gain inspiration, and hopefully learn a new thing or two while I was there. As I look back now, I didn't truly understand the value and education I would receive from attending that conference.

For those of you not familiar with AOCF, this conference specifically focuses on all aspects of the culinary world. It covers everything about food, presentation, logistics, and management. It is a conference designed specifically for chefs or anyone that has a role in culinary operations.

Art of Catering Food provides so many different types of education when you really look at it. First and foremost, there are so many different sessions available to attend. Maybe you need some inspiration on how to make your stations more interactive or you really could use some fresh ideas on hors d'oeuvres development. Perhaps you have some questions on the management side that you are looking for help with. No matter what it is you are looking for, there is going to be something or someone there that will help you find the inspiration or information you are seeking.

Additionally, another incomparable part of attending this conference is the people. It's the chefs and the connections you will make that, to me, are an immeasurable value and opportunity. I personally remember meeting so many chefs back in D.C. and getting to talk with all of them. Learning where they are located, how many events they do, how many staff they have, what type of food they produce, the struggles they face—we all spoke the same culinary language, and we had an innate understanding of where we're

coming from.

Specifically, I remember meeting Robin Selden of Marcia Selden Catering & Events; she was probably one of the first chefs I met at AOCF. Now, those of you who know Robin also know she is one of the coolest people in the world, but in that first interaction I had with her, she made sure I knew that if there was ever anything I needed help with or had questions about, I should just reach out to her and she would love to help. As I continued to meet more chefs, this same sentiment was shared by every single one of them. That's the greatest thing about Art of Catering Food—the education, the mentoring, and the connections you make—it's limitless.

When I look back to that first conference I attended in D.C., I am very thankful for what it has provided for me as a chef. It truly is an unmatched culinary experience, and I am so excited for its return in Orlando! I hope to see you there. 

See Jay Varga LIVE!

You can see Jay Varga live and in-person during Art of Catering Food (March 26–27) and at Catersource + The Special Event, March 27–30 in Orlando, FL during the following sessions:

Salads...Who Needs Lettuce? (AOCF) Sunday, March 26th at 10:45 a.m.

Culinary Theatrics: How to Get the Most Action Out of Your Station, (CS) Tuesday, March 28th at 11:15 a.m.

Building your Culinary Depth Chart, (CS) Wednesday, March 29th at 1:00 p.m.

Visit <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent> for all the details

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Are you ready to be inspired?

Whether you are looking for ways to enhance your operations or want to liaise with, learn from, and see what catering chefs around the country are doing to appeal to new clients, the Art of Catering Food will expand your catering skills and knowledge.



informaconnect.com/art-of-catering-food | [#artofcateringfood](https://twitter.com/artofcateringfood)

EXCLUSIVE: 18th Annual DMC Spotlight (p. 72)
This year's Gala Award nominees! (p. 56)

SPECIAL EVENTS

SPRING 2023

**JAZZING UP
ENTERTAINMENT**

p. 8

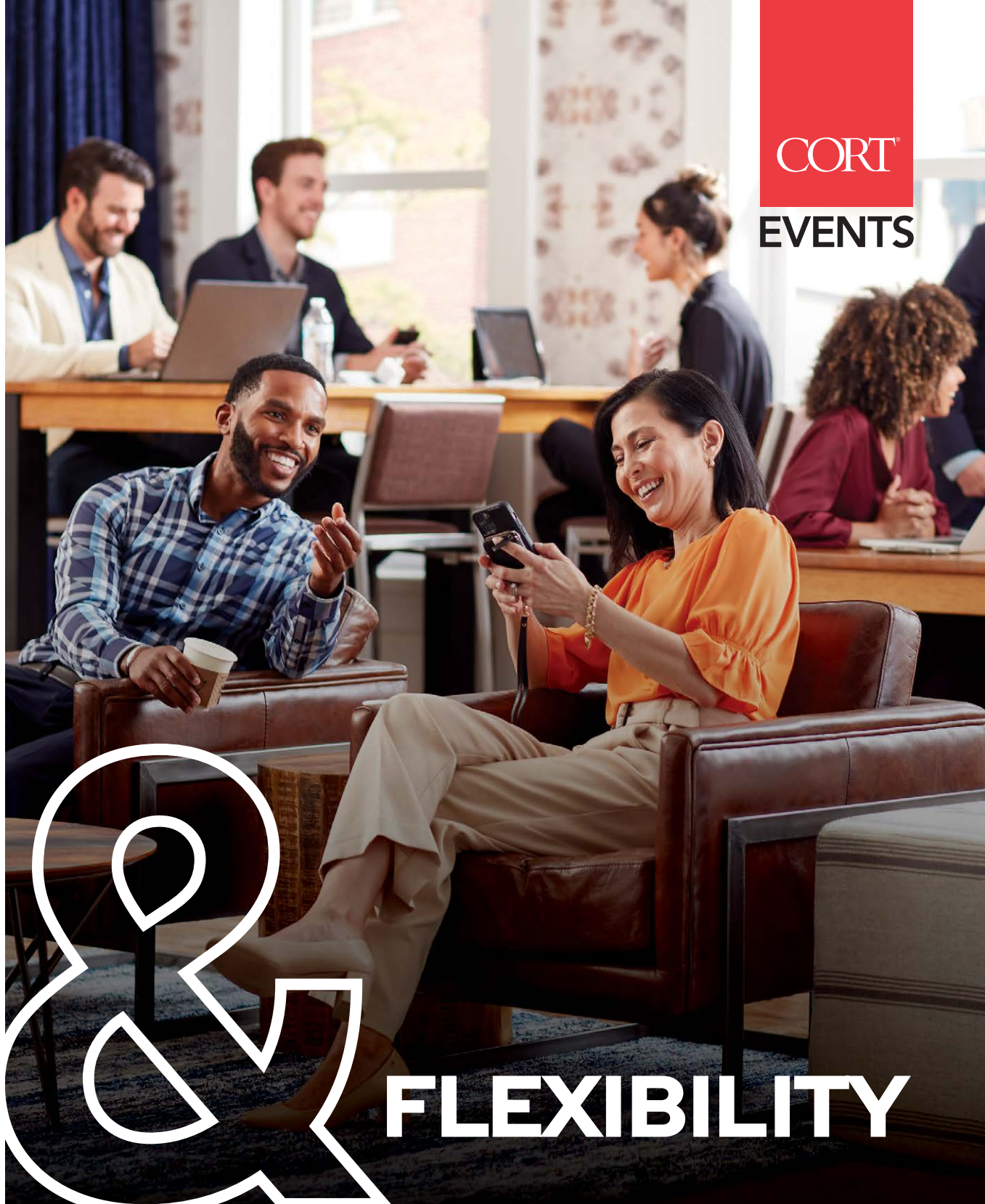
WHAT A VIEW!

p. 16



*Show Issue
2023!*

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SPRING 2023

THIS ISSUE



FEATURES

30 BASK IN THE SUNSHINE

Catersource + The Special Event head to Orlando, March 27–30

72 18TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT

Highlighting the top brands in the world of DMCs

66 THE SEARCH IS OVER

Kate Patay Named 2023 Richard Carbotti Volunteerism Award Recipient

24 A DAZZLING EVENTISTA

A conversation with industry beacon and Opening General Session speaker Marcy Blum

56 AND THE NOMINEES ARE...

Let's give a round of applause to this year's Gala Award nominees!



COLUMNS

04 Editor's Page

Another op'nin', another show!

104 The Last Word

Why experiential marketing matters to your business

DEPARTMENTS

08 On Trend

Jazzing up your entertainment

16 Food for Fetes

Leading Caterers of America treated to three-course dinner

88 Marketing & Media

Finding your focus at a conference

90 Steal This

Invitation inspiration

96 Business of Events

Maximizing social proof in 2023

98 As Seen In...

Cincinatti

102 Tech Talk

Four tech solutions you don't know you need (yet)

On the cover: Macarons make a lovely bed for an engagement ring in this photo shoot from Funky's Catering. Photo courtesy Odessa James Photography



EDITOR'S PAGE

ANOTHER OP'NIN', ANOTHER SHOW!

I recently toured the Museum of Broadway while in New York for meetings. Most of my university education centered on theatrical production, so I was pretty much in my happy place. If you've never been, it is a multi-level museum, celebrating Broadway throughout its storied history. While I loved exploring the costumes, props, and programs from the many shows, it was the final level that made me weepy, because that's where my kind of magic happens.

That level is where most of us are represented: the people who conceptualize and produce the shows. The people who decorate the stages and work the sound and light boards. It was wonderful to linger in that area and see the spotlight trained so brightly on unsung back-of-house heroes.

It certainly made me think about the shows we have trading in just a few short weeks. It has been nearly a year of planning for Catersource + The Special Event for the best-of-the-best in the events and catering spaces—you! All that we do is in service of elevating and shining that spotlight on the beautiful work you do to make life's moments exceptional.

Like any event or production, there's a lot of work and sleepless nights to get to "opening night." This year at CS+TSE, new experiences await:

- **Enjoy our new "Event Escape" rooms.** Watch florists in action, relax with a yoga session, pop a flower into your lapel, or take a Texas-sized selfie with colleagues.
- **Tablescapes!** They're back after quite the hiatus, and you can participate in their design on our exhibit hall floor—or watch them unfold and take all the inspiration back home for your next event.
- **Celebrations:** Awards are back and bigger than ever, because it is about time to celebrate our industry again! Let's behold the beauty of our collective work and celebrate at the ACE, Gala, and CATIE awards, as well as applaud our Lifetime Achievement recipients for their incredible contributions. It's going to be great big glitter bomb of a night.
- **Networking:** Industry associations are collaborating with the show so fervently, we could call this an "industry week!" You won't find any other event with such a robust and eclectic professional mix. From the International Caterers Association (ICA) to International Live Events Association (ILEA) to Academic Event Planners (AEP) and more, you'll meet allies, learn about ways you can give back to your industry, and make your best new connection ever.

Beyond that, we have been working diligently on this digital issue to ensure your education extends further than our classrooms. Use our annual list of DMCs (page 72) as a reference for your destination events, enjoy our piece on entertainment trends (page 8), and gather inspiration from our many content experts featured inside.

But until March 27–30, a little more work and then, in the words of one of my all-time favorite musicals (*Pippin*), "We've got magic to do, just for you!" See you soon!

Kathleen

Kathleen Stoehr
Director of Community & Content Strategy

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Spring 2023 THIS ISSUE

CONTRIBUTORS



Marketing expert **Christie Osborne** (appearing at CS+TSE) strategizes how to get the most out of a conference.



Tech professional **Nora Sheils** provides solutions to simplify your business.



Wedding PR and marketing consultant **Meghan Ely** talks maximizing social proof ahead of her session at The Special Event.



Venue owner **Ian Ramirez** discusses experiential marketing (a preview to his upcoming CS+TSE session).

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ON TREND

Spinning acrobats on Cyr wheels are a fun form of entertainment. Pictured here: an LED-lit Cyr wheel performer amuses attendees at Catersource + The Special Event in 2022. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

In today's event landscape, every aspect of an affair must draw in attendees and capture their attention entirely.



Fazzing Up Your Entertainment

BY AMANDA
NICKLAUS

Humans have craved entertainment since the beginning of time, albeit in a variety of forms. From campfire storytelling to Roman gladiator competitions to court jesters amusing royalty, people have gathered to forget about their own lives for a bit and get lost in another world.

The evolution of entertainment has been influenced by changes in culture, society, personal taste, political times, and technology. Today, no event is complete without several forms of entertainment.

Since bouncing back from the isolation of the global pandemic, we have seen the celebration of gathering and the explosion of immersive entertainment. In today's event landscape, every aspect must draw in attendees and capture their attention entirely, from décor to dining to entertainment.

As the demand increases for bigger and bolder entertainment, event planners will need to know what captivates their attendees and keep up with trends. Grab a notepad and get inspired by the amusements we're seeing as we begin 2023.



ON TREND

Music

Live music is back! Now that social gatherings are back at pre-pandemic levels, all the industries that depended on events are coming back as well. According to [Eventbrite's 2022 Trends Report](#), music was the number one category of ticket sales.

"Music was clearly the lifeblood for Americans in 2022, with approximately 28 million tickets transacted on Eventbrite," the report stated.

"Despite anticipating continued inflation in 2023, close to half (48%) of U.S. consumers surveyed say they're willing to pay more for music events—whether for a performer they feel passionate about, or because they're willing to pay for great experiences, no matter the performer."

The report showed that themed music nights are trending upward, like 80's night, disco night, and K-Pop night. These types of shows are on the rise, and their popularity is evidenced by the 130% growth in attendance rates. Other rising trends include album release parties and music events with Afro-Caribbean roots (Reggae, Afrobeats, Soca, etc.). Silent discos—while we loved them—are on the way out, making way for our favorite artists to perform live once again.

Another music trend we're seeing: roaming—and sometimes dancing—violinists. These performers will dress up in their glitziest outfits and weave in and out among event attendees, often dancing or playing over pop tracks, à la Lindsey Stirling.

Make sure your events this year have music themes and live performances to wow the crowd and increase those attendance numbers!



(Above) Live instruments and vocal performances are on the rise post-pandemic. Photo courtesy JAG Studios

(Below) A roaming violinist from CS+TSE 2021. Photo courtesy WTA Photo via SpotMyPhotos





Renowned artist Lindsey Stirling is known for her choreographed violin performances. Photo courtesy Getty Images

Eventbrite's survey asked participants about what they want more of in 2023. These were the top 15 activities and events they stated heading into the new year:

1. Concerts at independent and local music venues: 85%
2. Music festivals: 81%
3. Live performing arts (e.g., plays, ballet, opera): 79%
4. Art shows/gallery openings: 70%
5. Outdoor fitness activities (marathons, outdoor yoga, etc.): 68%
6. Charity fundraising tournaments (e.g., wiffle ball, golf, bake-offs, etc.): 64%
7. Group fitness classes (dance workouts, boxing, etc.): 63%
8. Scavenger hunts: 63%
9. Genre-themed music events (indie night, emo night, Reggae Fest): 60%
10. Spirituality events (meditation classes, breathwork workshops): 57%
11. Networking events: 57%
12. 5k walks/runs: 55%
13. Book discussions: 50%
14. Pub crawls: 47%
15. Poetry readings: 40%

Source: Eventbrite



ON TREND

Photo ops

Social media has certainly influenced the way we view entertainment—will this event space look good on Insta? Is this activity able to be captured in an intriguing TikTok video?

Each year, we see brand activations become more visually grabbing and even more immersive, creating mini experiences that transport attendees into another world inside of an event itself. Absolut Vodka made headlines in 2022 with its Coachella activation Absolut.Land, which mixed VR Metaverse technology with different activity rooms that celebrated art, fashion, culture, and cocktails. Cheetos® partnered with Amazon Alexa for a “hands-free house” at SXSW, promoting hands-free technology attendees could use while eating Cheetos.

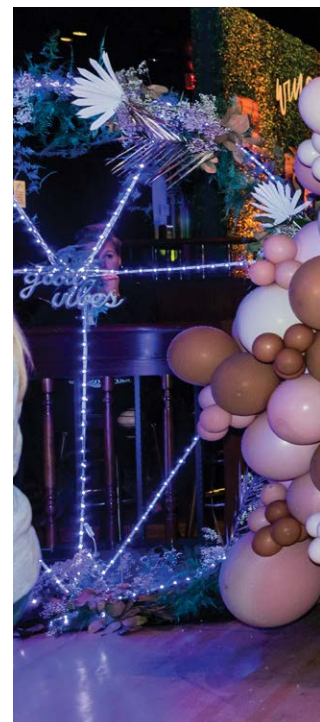
Try it yourself! Visit the brand-activated Event Escape rooms at this year's [Catersource + The Special Event](#) in Orlando. Turn to page 54 for more on that.

Another trend to keep an eye on is immersive dining. Every aspect of the event should be entertaining and photo-worthy, including eating and drinking! With decoratively displayed food and beverage walls becoming standard, and experiential dining on the rise, attendees will be captivated with each bite and sip. Think themed dinners, VR integration, theatric dinner games and shows—anything to step up the usual drinking and dining! To get inspired, check out our [immersive dining blog on specialevents.com](#).



(Above) Immersive brand activations are on a path to outdo each other, giving attendees exciting opportunities to be transported into entire mini worlds in an event space. Absolut Vodka wowed the event world with their Metaverse activation at Coachella last year, using VR technology to immerse attendees in a colorful branded experience. Photo courtesy Pink Sparrow

(Below) Experiential dining is a rising trend, creating entertaining and engaging experiences with every aspect of food and beverage. Pictured here: California restaurant iChina, which uses VR visual elements to immerse guests in a themed dining experience. Photo courtesy iChina Restaurant



[com](#). (For more on immersive dining, turn to page 8 in the adjoining *Catersource* magazine.) We also like these interactive beverage stations: orbs that give off an edible flavored (sometimes spiked) mist, which attendees can drink with a straw. Anything to put a new spin on the old and get that amazing photo!

Interactive stations

Playful interactive games and activity stations bring out everyone's inner child and competitive side. This year, we'll be seeing more escape rooms, ball pits, bouncy castles, and glitter bars. Even better? Make people part of the games! Giant human foosball is a popular game where attendees take the place of the plastic players; giant human claw machines are also popular, where attendees can become the claw and get lowered into a machine to pick out prizes!

Keep up with technology

Use augmented reality and virtual reality games, maps, and information stations to keep guests plugged in. QR code scavenger hunts are also gaining momentum. Whether using the latest technology or the most classic games that have withstood the test of time, games and activities are the way to keep guests having fun.



(Above) A glitter car wash Pride activation by Yahoo and Superfly glitzed up attendees for photo shoots and amped up their celebratory spirit. Photo courtesy Superfly

(Left) Immersive and photo-worthy brand activations are a trendy form of passive entertainment, giving guests a chance to step out of the main event and into a shareable photo op moment. Photo courtesy BYC Photography





ON TREND

Visual performance

Above all, entertainment should be fun to watch. Combining service with entertainment—like flair bartending, servers in champagne hoop skirts or costumes with hawker trays—is a great way to sneak subtle entertainment into any event. Even actors in theatrical costumes or LED-lit costumes mingling with guests or posing as living statues add an exciting visual element to the scene.

Of course, stage performances will always be great entertainment. From spinning Cyr wheels to aerial silk performers, from sand artists to pyro performers, watching skilled artists work their magic always hypes a crowd. Holograms are also working their way into the spotlight, with advanced technology to bring a whole new type of entertainment to life. We're also predicting an increase in drag shows and standup comedy as these acts make their way into the mainstream.

Entertainment comes in many forms, from performance to interactive activity. As we make our way through the beginning of this new year, remember that innovation is what makes people pull out their cameras—trust your creativity, try a few trends, and wow your crowd with great entertainment! ●



(Top) No costume is too flashy—if it captures attendees' attention it's the right kind of entertainment! Event by Catalyst Arts. Photo courtesy Show Ready

(Above middle) One trendy way to immerse event goers is to have costumed actors mingling with guests, bringing the event theme to life. Here, a futuristic space theme at the 2022 Catersource + The Special Event's Event Experience popped with LED-lit otherworldly actors, to the delight of attendees. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

(Bottom left) Live music is ready for a revolution after the pandemic. Shown here: Renowned DJ Questlove emcees and DJs a Hip Hop History Brunch event hosted by The Event Nerd in April 2022. Photo courtesy The Event Nerd



Aerial hoops, silks, trapezes, and other airborne acts bring circus elements to any event. Shown here: The Event Experience at Catersource + The Special Event 2022. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



Master the Stage During Catersource + The Special Event

Want more inspiration? Catch these sessions at this year's Catersource + The Special Event, taking place March 27–30 in Orlando, FL.

- **High-End Interactive Virtual Events with 3D Stage Entertainment & Live Auctions**
Tuesday, March 28 at 8:30 a.m.
(Michael Israel)
- **Carpe Per Diems! A Close (& Fun) Look at Managing Speaker & Entertainment Contracts**
Wednesday March 29 at 1:00 p.m.
(Adam Kahan)

More information can be found at <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-the specialevent/>



The

The View was named one of 2019's hottest new venue openings across the globe by The 2019 Venue Report.

Vien

Leading Caterers of America treated to three-course dinner

BY KATHLEEN STOEHR

PERCHED ON THE EDGE OF MT. ADAMS, celestial Cincinnati panoramas combined with impeccable cuisine, all to reward attendees of the Leading Caterers of America Executive Summit, in November 2022. It was a three-course plated meal to impress, with passed appetizers to begin, and wine pairings throughout that delighted with their surprising companionship.

With a 25-foot ceiling, incredible crystal chandelier, 18-foot bar, and natural parquet flooring, one might think that food would take second place to the venue. Not so! Venue and cuisine went toe-to-toe, sparring for attention and in the end, it was declared a “no contest” match—or should we say it was a double knockout? Here’s a look at this tremendous evening and its matching menu from Funky’s Catering Events (soon to be DelightMore).

All photos courtesy Shae Huth (Gameday) and the caterer except where noted



FOOD FOR FÊTES



(Above) **170-degree panoramic views of Cincinnati** could be seen from nearly every angle. Indeed, **The View** was named one of 2019's hottest new venue openings across the globe by The 2019 Venue Report.

House lox, quick pickled cucumber, and pink peppercorn spread.

Cocktail reception

As guests in their best finery arrived, an ultra-premium open bar awaited, and a palate quenching **Altun Rosé Rioja** (waitstaff passed) was paired with passed appetizers and a large fruit, cheese, and charcuterie display. Very few tables were reserved, allowing guests to choose their tablemates.





(Above) A delightful fruit, cheese, and charcuterie display greeted guests toward the event entrance.



Sakura Farms Wagyu Slider, Amish cheddar with tomato jam and pea shoots on mini brioche.



FOOD FOR FÊTES

Duck confit rillette on rustic French baguette with Rohn black currant relish passed appetizer. Photo courtesy Sarah Babcock and the caterer



Red, red, red was the overarching tone throughout the venue.





The incredible chandelier was a true eyecatcher in the venue, setting a mood of glamour and grace throughout the evening festivities.

Time to be seated!

Red florals and gold table accents added to the luxe experience. The music was classic and kept low so that conversation was not impeded. Service was efficient and friendly, attentive, and well appointed. While many guests were surprised to see a red wine paired with a second course of sea bass and steamed mussels, the pairing proved to be spot on. ●



(Above) The three-course menu with wine pairings and dessert.

(Left) Meanwhile, "backstage," wine is being prepped for guests.





FOOD FOR FÊTES

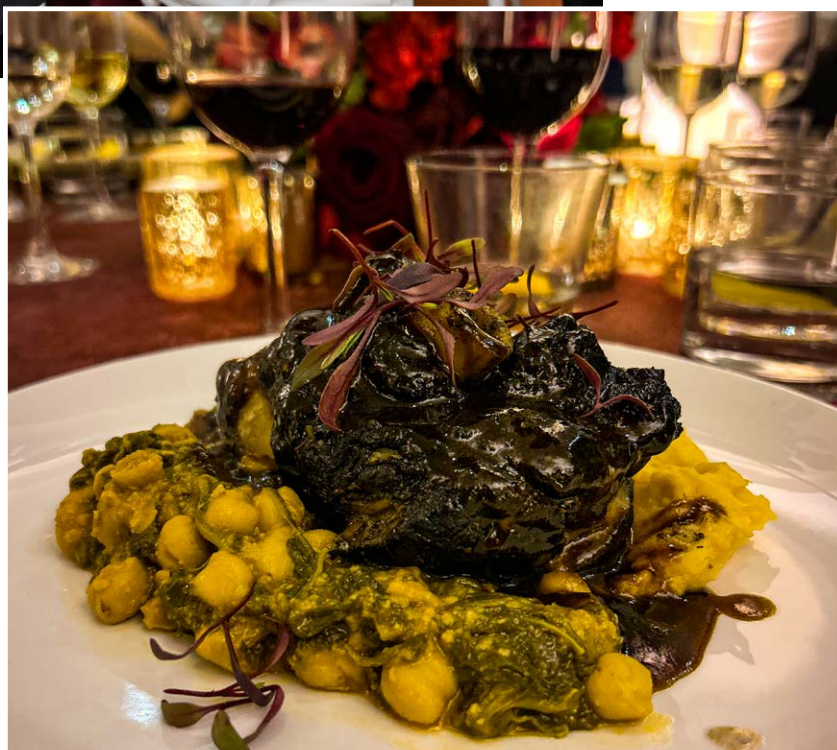


First course: a fall goat cheese salad with red oak and frisée greens, dried cherries and pistachios, pomegranate reduction, blood orange, golden beets, and candied bacon jowl.



First course wine pairing: Jose Pariente Sauvignon Blanc.

Third course: Thomas Keller lamb shank with lamb demi-glaze, espinacas con garbanzos, roasted root vegetable mash. Photo courtesy Kathleen Stoehr





Leading Caterers of America (LCA) is comprised of the top caterers and event venues in the United States and Canada. When you need a caterer to make your next event exceptional, perfect and delicious, choose a LCA caterer.

Planning something special?

Let the best of the best in all things events be your guide.



Corporate

LCA specializes in corporate events of all types - marketing, celebratory, client related, employee morale, and others. Whether held in the host's facility, or in an off-premise location, LCA members are able to deliver a high value corporate event experience.

Photo Credit: Catering Creations



Weddings

At its collective portfolio of some of the most desirable wedding venues in the United States and Canada, the LCA caters many thousands of weddings annually.

Most LCA members have dedicated wedding specialists on staff to ensure this most important day is executed flawlessly, no matter the level of complexity.

Photo Credit: Bonura Hospitality Group



Social

Bar and bat mitzvahs, First Communions, quinceañeras, retirements and graduations, and even funerals are all important life cycle events. Superb food and service are crucial to making these events special and memorable, and the LCA is a perfect resource for those products.

Photo Credit: Catering by Michael's



Nonprofits

Galas and fundraisers are key to the success of most charitable ventures - including both financial and membership. The LCA is highly attuned to the needs of most charities, and is a great resource for all the necessary components to make these gala events successful.

Photo Credit: G Catering

Elite talent. Unbeatable service. Right where you need it.

Find a LCA caterer in your region!



MIDWEST

Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio, Wisconsin

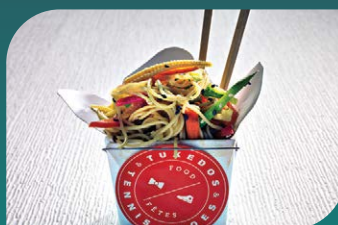
Photo Credit: Zilli Hospitality Group



SOUTH

Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas

Photo Credit: Bill Hansen Catering



WEST

Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington

Photo Credit: DSquared Hospitality Company



EAST

Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia

Photo Credit: The Classic Catering People

Learn more at LeadingCaterers.com

A DAZZLING *Eventista*



A conversation with
industry beacon and
Opening General Session
Speaker **Marcy Blum**

BY AMANDA NICKLAUS

Pictured here: It's as if the water extends onto the land, with undulating florals echoing the aquatic backdrop in this installation from Marcy Blum Events. Photo courtesy Allan Zepeda

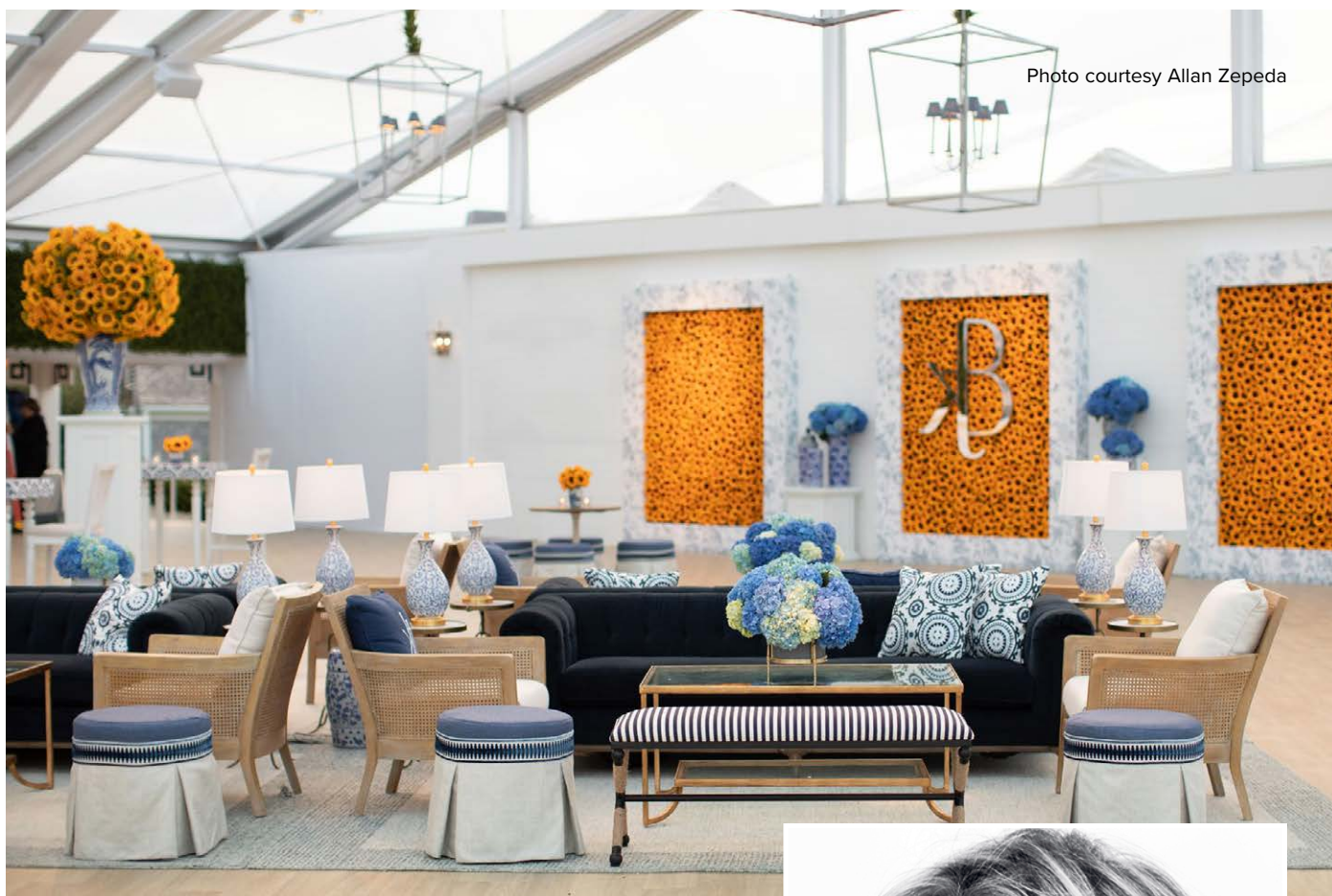


Photo courtesy Allan Zepeda

A major takeaway of last year's **Catersource + The Special Event** was that back of house and front of house need to work together to succeed. This year's Opening Keynote speaker, "eventista" **Marcy Blum**, is exactly the person to pave the way for this collaboration.

Blum has produced the weddings of several A-list celebrities, from the likes of Savannah and LeBron James to Billy Joel to Nate Berkus and Jeremiah Brent. She launched Marcy Blum Associates in 1986, and since has been named a top international event planner by *VOGUE*, *Harper's BAZAAR*, and *Martha Stewart Weddings*, and has been named one of the country's top planners by The New York Times. She's also been featured on several TV shows, including *the Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Good Morning America*, and *The Today Show*.

But before she was a highly recognized innovator in the events industry, Blum was in the catering business.

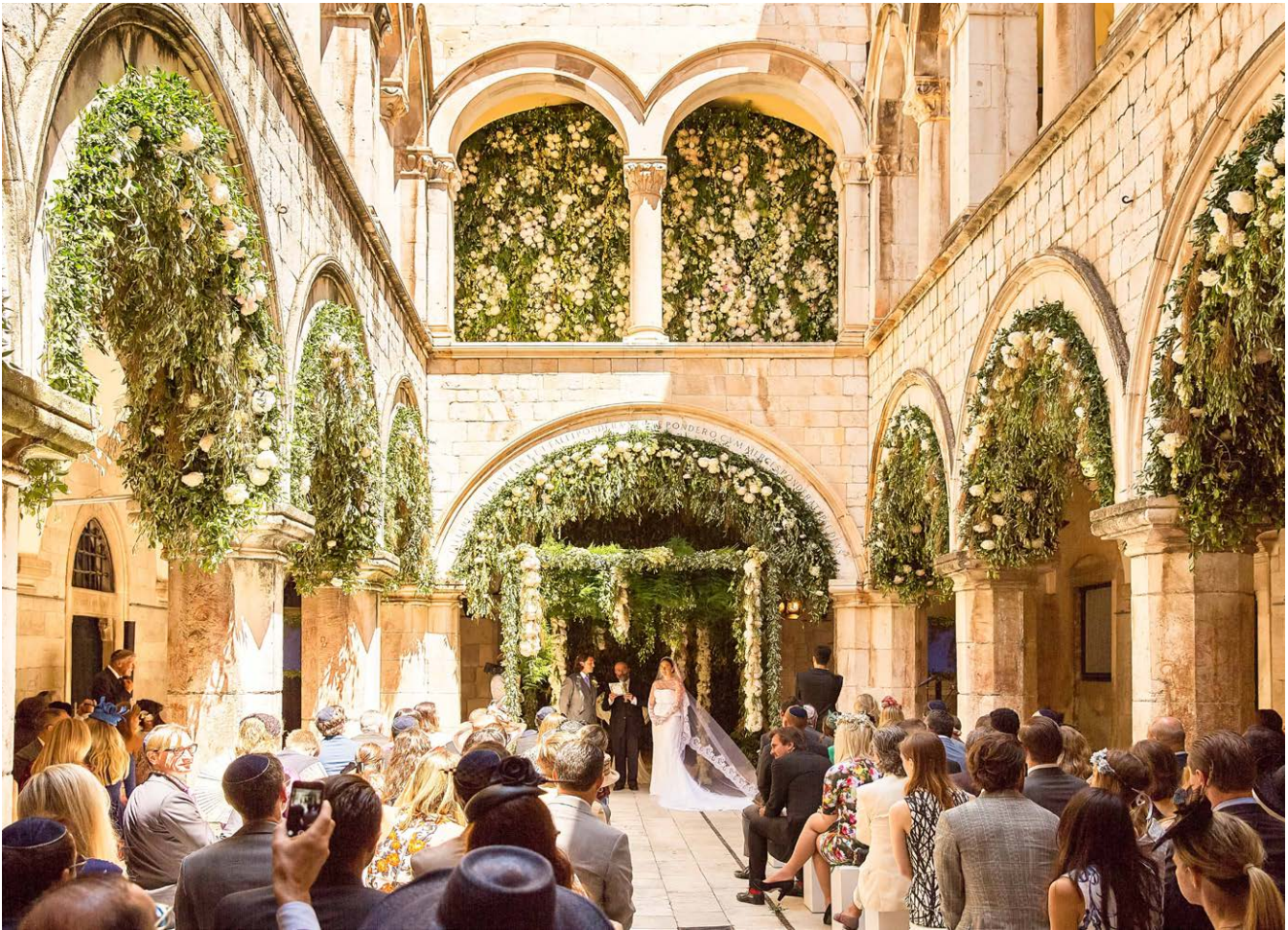
Blum graduated from the prestigious Culinary Institute of America, starting her career in restaurants and catering and eventually moving into events planning. Blending the elements of catering with event planning created a holistic approach that Blum takes into every aspect of her work.

Blum also comes from a performing arts background (a graduate of the Performing Arts High School), which plays into her theatrical designs. "I'm a storyteller and I like to figure out how someone's going to understand what I'm talking about, but especially because we're pitching ideas all the time— they're not only crazy expensive but sound absurd."

What may sound absurd is part of Blum's success. As an artist taking inspiration from the world around her, she's not afraid to push the



“You really need to push things, and to push things you have to take risks, and it can be scary. Sometimes it takes another iteration to make it work if you're trying another way.”



(Above) This 16th-century palace in Croatia was utterly transformed into a floral fantasy of peonies, jasmine, and tuberose by Thierry Boutemy for an event by Marcy Blum. Photo courtesy Robert Fairer; (Right) A Cape Cod Wedding weekend dinner from Marcy Blum Events. Photo courtesy Allan Zepeda

envelope. “If you stay safe, you’re not only not good for yourself, you know, you’re not good for your clients,” she told *Special Events* (SE). “You really need to push things, and to push things you have to take risks, and it can be scary. Sometimes it takes another iteration to make it work if you’re trying another way.”

But risk taking is how Blum has brought some of her absurd ideas to life. For her, some of the best moments in her planning career come from not being 100 percent certain about her ideas. “When you come up with a concept that even though you sold it, you’re not 100% sure it’s gonna happen...and you walk in and you’re like ‘Oh my god! I dreamt up this really weird thing and it happened! And it not only happened but it worked!’ That’s really fun.”

A world of inspiration

It’s easy to see that Blum is an artist, although she protests the use of the word. “I’m a really good plagiarizer,” she insists. But what she calls “plagiarizing” is really a great sense of taking inspiration from the world around her. “I try to be extremely aware of what is around me and see if I can pick up anything that I can plagiarize,” she says with a laugh.

“I’m very adamant [that] most of my ideas...come from restaurants or activations or stores; I try very hard—obviously we’re all Instagram addicts, but I try very hard not to just pick up something and drop it into my idea board. I’ll look and say, ‘That’s a pretty idea, I wonder if we did it like this or like that.’”

Not only does Blum find inspiration

in the world around her; she practically avoids taking ideas from event trends.

“I rarely, almost never, read bridal magazines; I’m much more interested in *Architectural Digest* or *India Art N Design* or whatever, otherwise...if you look on Instagram, all our stuff starts looking the same.”

For Blum, wherever she is holds opportunity for inspiration. For instance, at a restaurant, she’ll take note: “that was a cool way to serve the salt, or what they do with the olive oil or whatever.” For Blum, all these little borrowed details add up to a new, unique creation. “You amass enough of those; you get something interesting.”

Inspiration also comes from places that have nothing to do with the events industry. “I’m looking at a mobile here at Saks with seashells, and I was like, ‘Well, it’s a little gaudy, but I bet if we





colored it this way, or did that, I bet that would be an interesting thing to hang in a tent.”

A way with words

Laughter is something that comes as quickly to Blum as inspiration. “I am not only funny, but I find humor in just about everything, and if [clients] find that disrespectful that’s not gonna be a good fit. Humor and elegance are not mutually exclusive.” Her quick wit and depth of industry wisdom are clearly contributors to her successful additional careers in

writing and speaking. (She’s the author of the best-selling *Wedding Planning for Dummies* and *The Wedding Kit for Dummies* and is a sought-after speaker.)

Blum is excited to be back speaking at Catersource + The Special Event this month. Her first encounter speaking at CS+TSE was when Catersource founder Michael Roman, who mentored Blum, enlisted her to take the stage. Now, she’s ready to share what she’s learned over the past 20 years since her first appearance.

Her mission? Make planners and caterers realize that a holistic,

collaborative approach isn’t just good etiquette; it’s good business.

“I understand the back of the house, I came from back of the house...I’m hoping to educate both sides of the event on how to upsell and how to help each other upsell. Because at the end of the day this is not about *kumbaya*; it’s about business and money. I’d like to show people how easy it is, or at least give them a shot at selling something.”

Blum wants fellow planners to realize the importance of food and beverage, “not only for the greater good of the event, but also how much money



This page and previous page: A 40th birthday celebrated with a dinner party in the sand in Southampton on a beautiful September day. Tiki torches, candlelight, and the moon lit the table filled with orange, pink, and red flowers, and guests ate a delicious meal of Carbone pasta and Morty's Oysters. Photo courtesy Luis Zepeda

is left on the table because no one is paying attention." She describes the old cliché of a chef throwing a French knife at the front of house staff, telling them to get out of the kitchen. "Wouldn't it be nice if everyone had a common goal?"

"You can't just rent beautiful China without consulting with the chef what he's putting on there, because it may not work at all. You rent a beautiful soup plate with a huge rim and they can't stick the filet on there and that's a problem and they hate us for it. You have to try to do it collaboratively and that's how you can sell an extra course; you can sell a salad and cheese course, you can bring in sommeliers, there's so many things you can do if you collectively and collaboratively get the clients on board." ●

Learn her Secrets at Catersource + The Special Event

Marcy Blum's Opening General Session on Wednesday March 29th at 9:00 a.m. will dive into details and teach planners and caterers her techniques for collaboration and for creating a collective plan for upselling.

The Old Razzle Dazzle: Tips on Reaching the Next Level of Hospitality

Come to this premier event prior to the opening of the Exhibit Hall. Join Marcy Blum for an inspirational presentation that will empower both caterers and event planners alike to attract and retain luxury clientele. She'll be sharing insider tips on how to increase your food and beverage revenue, go above and beyond for your clients, and give them a truly unforgettable experience.

Key takeaways will include:

- The buzzwords that will help you get high end clients
- How to present prospective menus to luxury clients
- What is the concept of "unreasonable" hospitality, and how to utilize it in your business
- What is a pre-tasting and why it's a very good idea
- How to read between the lines for what a client is looking for
- How event planners and catering salespeople can work together in mutually beneficial harmony

More information can be found at <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/>



Bask in the Sun

Catersource + The Spec
head to Orlando
March 27–30





shine

ial Event



Register
Now!

Catersource + The Special Event is the best place to expand your network, learn from industry veterans, and get inspired about your career. This year will be bigger and better with several additions, including the new MeetingsNet track for meeting planners. Get ready to grow as an event professional as we celebrate the incredible world of events!



Don't miss a moment! Arrive early Monday 3/27, depart Friday morning 3/31

Arriving early? On Monday, kick off your week by attending a Venue Tour around Orlando, then head to **Connect Live**, held at Big Fin Seafood Kitchen at 7:30 p.m. and ending at 10:30 p.m. End your week by joining us at the **Closing Night Celebration** at ICON Park. In between, you won't want to miss a thing. ***Here's a look at all that will be offered!***

Take a Venue Tour to see the magic of Orlando

Arriving on Sunday or very early Monday? Here's how you should start your experience! **On Monday, March 26 at 1:00 p.m.**, we'll hop aboard buses to tour some of the stand-out venues of Orlando. It's a

perfect way to gather inspiration, see some magical spaces, and start networking for the week! Venues will include USTA, The MEZZ, Vu, and ICON Park.

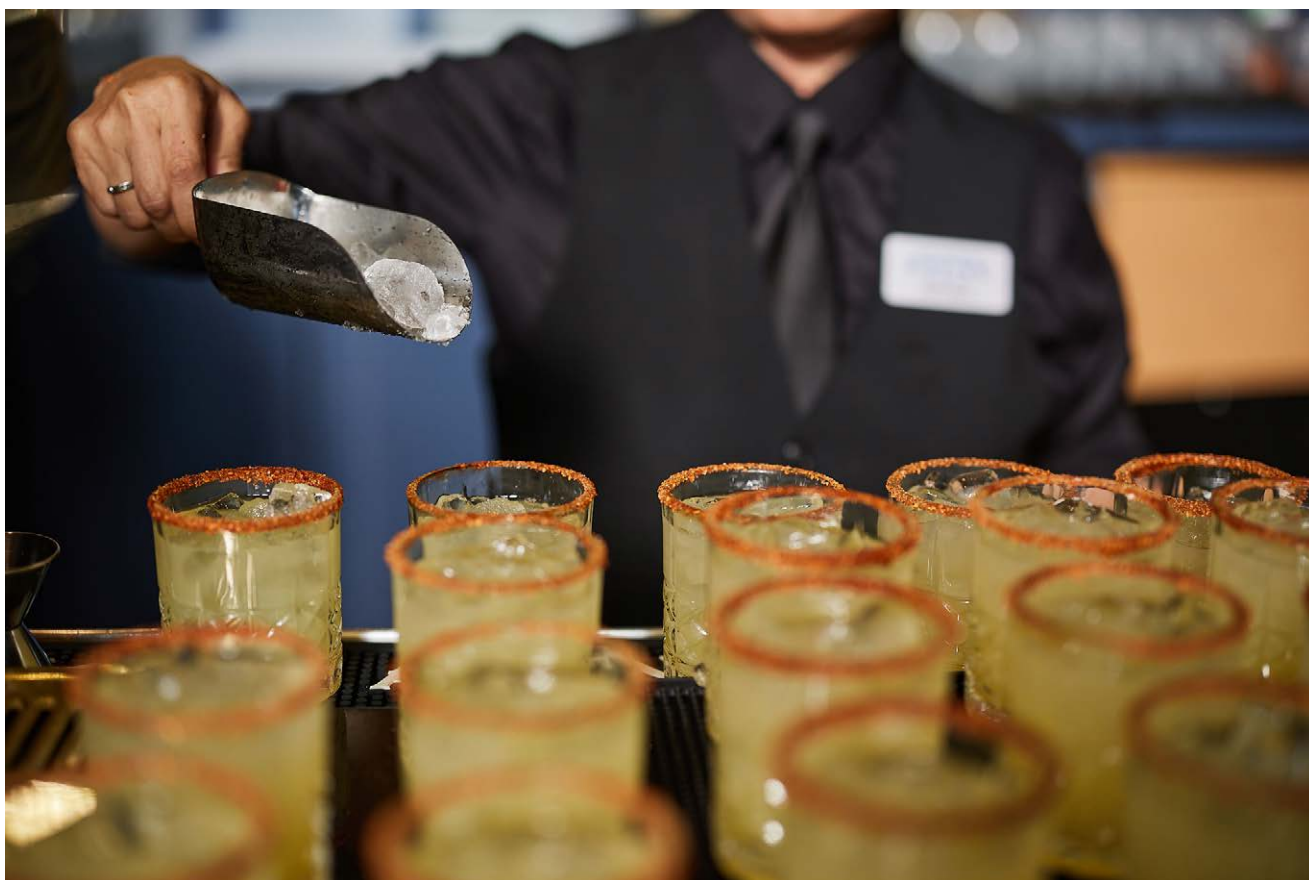


Last year, after arriving in sunny California, attendees toured SoFi Stadium, Shrine Auditorium, and City National Grove of Anaheim. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



(Facing page, bottom right) Pineapple margaritas awaited tour attendees at City National Grove of Anaheim during the 2022 Venue Tour. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

A tasting offered by City National
Grove at last year's venue tour.
Photo courtesy WASIO Photography





At the Opening General Session on the Keynote Stage, Marcy Blum will kick off the 2023 Catersource + The Special Event conference and tradeshow with her session, “The Old Razzle Dazzle: Tips on Reaching the Next Level of Hospitality.” Blum is an expert in entertaining, etiquette, food, and wine. She has been producing creative, magical, and personal events for over 30 years, launching Marcy Blum Associates in 1986 and is frequently noted as an innovator in the events industry. Blum infuses

her culinary arts background with her humorous and sane approach to entertaining, to create extraordinary memories for her clients. The highly renowned, self-deemed New York City “eventista” will discuss her philosophy for presenting clients with unforgettable events on **Wednesday, March 29th at 9:00 a.m.** The Opening General Session is included in the purchase of any pass, from All Access to tradeshow only.

For more about Blum, turn to page 24 for a full profile.

See Art Smith LIVE

At the Closing General Session on the Keynote Stage, renowned chef and humanitarian Art Smith will take the stage on Thursday, March 30th, at 9:00 a.m. for his session “Creating a Brand,” where he’ll discuss how he became a chef and give advice on planning, creating trademarks, financial success, and more.

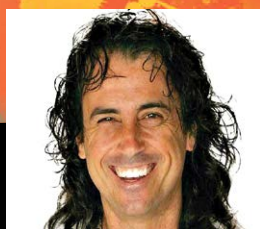
Smith is the executive chef and co-owner of Blue Door Kitchen & Garden in Chicago, Southern Art & Bourbon Bar in Atlanta, Art & Soul in Washington DC, Art Bird & Whiskey Bar at Grand Central Terminal in New York City, and Chef Art Smith’s Homecomin’ Florida Kitchen & Southern Shine Bar at Disney Springs at the Walt Disney World Resort. He has received two James Beard Foundation awards, is the author of several books, and is the founder of Common Threads, a non-profit organization teaching low-income children to cook wholesome and affordable meals since 2003. The Closing General Session is included in the purchase of any education pass or tradeshow plus pass.

For more about Smith, turn to page 55 in the adjoining Catersource magazine.



 *Register Now!*

New Voices



Michael Israel, Artist, Entertainer, Speaker, Fundraiser, Michael Israel Inc

"High-End Interactive Virtual Events with 3D Stage Entertainment & Live Auctions"

8:30 a.m. Tuesday, March 28



Gabriela Siebach, Conference Interpreting Services Manager, CESCO Linguistic Services

"The Ultimate Guide to Flawless Multilingual Events"

10:00 a.m. Tuesday, March 28



Heather Rogers, Co-founder/Speaker, Curated Entertainment

"Top Ten Tips For Proposals That Pop!"

11:15 a.m. Tuesday, March 28



Velia Amarasingham, Co-founder/Speaker, Curated Entertainment

"Top Ten Tips For Proposals That Pop!"

11:15 a.m. Tuesday, March 28



Justin Ball, CMP, President & Founder, Bespoke Event Group LLC

"Five Wellness Trends Meeting Planners Need to Follow"

11:15 a.m. Tuesday, March 28



Kawania Wooten, Principal Consultant, Howerton+Wooten Events and The Enlightened Creative

"Emergency Preparedness for Creative Pros: What to Do When 'Stuff' Hits the Fan"

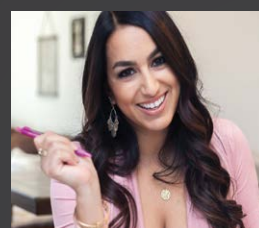
11:15 a.m. Tuesday, March 28



Shaun Gray, Managing Member, Shaun Gray Events, LLC

"5 Tips For Showing Up On Short Form Video"

11:15 a.m. Tuesday, March 28



Alexis Amato, CEO, Manifest with Alexis

"Posting for Profit!"

1:15 p.m. Tuesday, March 28



Jen Salerno, CMP, DES, Host & Moderator, JTS Connect, LLC & The Room Block Podcast

"Five Hacks to Ensure Your Conference (Emcee) is a Hit!"

1:15 p.m. Tuesday, March 28



Rolando Espinoza,
Co-Founder & Creative
Director, Champagne
Creative Group

*"Adventures In AR: Adding
the WOW Factor with
Smartphones"*

**2:30 p.m. Tuesday,
March 28**



Jordan Heller, Owner,
Suncoast Wedding & Event
Leaders (SWEL)

"Networker, He Wrote"

**4:00 p.m. Tuesday,
March 28**



Adam Kahan, Senior
Vice President, Empire
Entertainment, Inc.

*"Carpe Per Diems! A Close
(& Fun) Look at Managing
Speaker & Entertainment
Contracts"*

**1:00 p.m. Wednesday,
March 29**



Alan Katz, President,
Great Officiants

*"How to Get Your Business on
TV & Promoted in the Media"*

**1:00 p.m. Wednesday,
March 29**



Annette Naif, Event
Producer/Business Coach,
Naif Productions LLC

*"How to Start an Event or
Wedding Business"*

**2:30 p.m. Wednesday,
March 29**



Tiffany Rose Goodyear,
CEO, Scentex

*"Elevate Guest Experience with
the Power of Scent"*

**2:30 p.m. Wednesday,
March 29**



Zohe Felici, Owner, Felici
Events & Zohe Felici

*"Book Additional Five Figures
Per Month with a Simple 5 Step
Strategy"*

**2:30 p.m. Wednesday,
March 29**



Christopher Shelley,
Celebrant, Illuminating
Ceremonies

*"Ceremony Magic: How
Wedding Ceremonies Can
Launch the Party"*

**11:15 a.m. Tuesday,
March 28**



Register Now!

Event sessions to get the ideas flowing

Get ready to be struck with creative ideas for 2023 and beyond. This year's lineup features classes that will spark creativity in all aspects of your business. With topics focusing on sustainability, trends, branding,

professionalism, company culture, event tech, magic and wow-factors, wellness, and weddings (and much, much more) you'll leave The Special Event full of ideas and be ready to innovate!



A session from David Merrell and Jaka Jaiteh (AOO Events) last year called *Designing Events in this New COVID Reality* covered the latest health and wellness trends. The session included a sound bath meditation for extra oomph. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography





Attendees get the latest trends, tips, and information, as well as a chance to ask questions to the experts on stage. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



In 2022, Liza Roeser (FiftyFlowers) and Derek Woodruff (Syndicate Sales) shared floral trends in their session *What's Trending in Floral Design?* This year, join **Liza and Darin Bahl** (Tailored Twig) as they discuss **2023 Wedding Floral Designs and Trends** on **Thursday, March 30th at 2:00 p.m.** Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



Ruchir Mewawala (Rose Events) spoke during Catersource + The Special Event 2022 with his session *My Big Fat Indian Wedding*. Turn to page 80 in the adjoining *Catersource* magazine for more from Mewawala in regards to South Asian weddings. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



Join the fabulous Terrica (Cocktails & Details® / Terrica Inc.) as she takes the stage again in 2023 for three separate sessions: ***You Did What!?: The Real Reason Your Referrals Have Dried Up*** (Tues., March 28th at 11:15 a.m.); ***No Dozing on the Closing: 4 Closing Techniques to Make the Sale and Referrals*** (Tues., March 28th at 1:15 p.m.); and ***The Art of Balance: Building Your Brand While Living Your Life*** (Wed., March 29th at 2:30 p.m.). Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

Competitive cooking

Who doesn't love a good culinary competition? Watch DICED on **Wednesday, March 29th at 11:00 a.m.** to see chefs create the latest food trends right before your eyes (while they compete for a cash prize!). Impress clients with the "I saw it first" pitch you'll be able to give after seeing the best in the industry whip up inspired dishes.

Or, if you want to learn about cooking competitions and why your clients love them, join Chef/Owner Lee Anderson of Sugar

Beach Events, Hawaii, as she leads randomly selected attendees through the workings of setting up a cooking competition for clientele. In her *Creating Cooking Competitions for Corporate Team Building Experiences* (**Tuesday, 8:30 a.m.**) you can learn from a master chef how she assists planners in setting up competitions for their clients, and then watch it live—how it all unfolds, and the team building and actionable skills your clients will enjoy.



Robin Selden of Marcia Selden Catering & Events emcees the 2022 competition. Don't miss her as she returns to the stage to emcee DICED 2023! Photo courtesy WASIO Photography





Watch the industry's top chefs bring tasty event virtuals to life. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



Bring back food trends for your clients from this year's DICED competition. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



Creative plates from DICED 2022. Photos courtesy WASIO Photography

Certified Catering Consultants

Need a quick consultation about the catering aspects of your events? We have you covered—the **Certified Catering Consultants** (CCC) are experts in many applicable areas. They will offer free half-hour appointments on site to address your hospitality-related challenges, identify your highest value opportunities, and/or help you improve your business and ROI. Head to Honeybell Boardroom W233 to sign up for a free consultation during show hours Tuesday through Thursday.

Discover new ideas on the tradeshow floor

This year's tradeshow floor will look a bit different—we'll be mixing The Special Event exhibitors with Catersource exhibitors for less of a "church and state" feel. After all, we are family! You'll be able to browse, learn, taste samples, and buy from a plethora of trendsetting and relevant exhibitors, who are here to help you grow your business and recognize potential.

The excitement of the Opening and Closing General Sessions will also take place on the

tradeshow floor with keynote speakers Marcy Blum and Chef Art Smith.

The tradeshow floor will also host a lively happy hour on Wednesday afternoon starting at 4:00 pm. First, enjoy the lively and cocktail-filled session for inspiration, *Cocktail Trends with Pasha & Jeff* on the Keynote Stage, starting at 3:15 p.m. and then move onto the exhibit hall floor to enjoy libations while chatting with exhibitors.

Want to know how to build a beautiful tablescape incorporating lush florals? You'll want to be on the tradeshow floor at 11:15 a.m. on Wednesday. Join expert Las Vegas florists Michelle Joy Howard and Mylo Lopez for a fun and interactive way to express your creativity. Four to six teams will be tasked to create a fabulous tablescape with all the trimmings. In the fashion of a TV reality series, each team will be assigned a table and an overall client request. They will then have timed phases to design, choose products, and produce a tablescape. Tables will be available for photography afterward!

Finally, the Ignite stage on the tradeshow floor will offer a variety of business-forward intel. Join companies such as Instawork, Polaris Leasing, Kenect, Nowsta, and AllSeated as they present state of the industry-style information crucial to your business building needs.



The Fiftyflowers team shows off floral displays on the tradeshow floor.

All photos courtesy WASIO Photography



The photo op at Champagne Creative Group's 2022 exhibit was very popular.



Tables came to life at Pzazz, Inc.'s 2022 spot on the tradeshow floor.



US Foods offered s'more samples at CS+TSE 2022.

Leadership Lunch

Join us in celebrating impactful industry leaders at the annual **Leadership Lunch on Thursday, March 30th from 11:45 a.m. - 1:45 p.m.** at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts. This performing arts center is Orlando's main performance venue, boasting 10 event spaces, including the Walt Disney Theater, Steinmetz Hall, the DeVos Family Room, and a rooftop terrace.

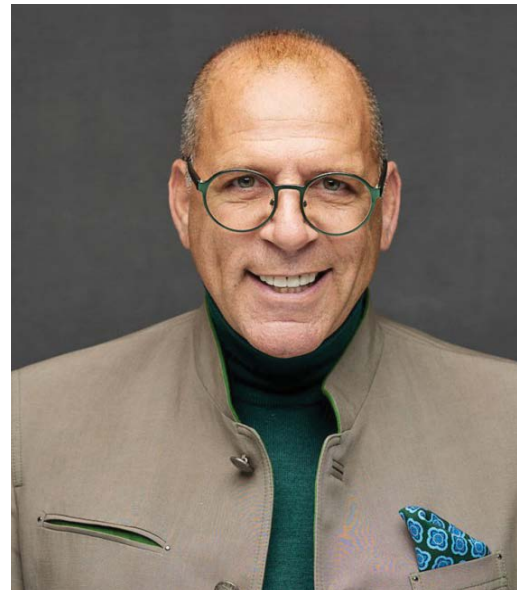
This business-casual lunch and learn session will feature an awards ceremony with the presentation of the surprise annual Steve Kemble award.

Lunch and Learn Session:
"The Courage to Change"

Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change! Prepare your palate for an innovative menu that will change the way you think about upscale cuisine and listen to the stories of dramatic career change from two of the industry's most iconic leaders, Lenny Talarico, CSEP and Kate Patay, CPCE.

The chair for this event is Heidi Brumbach, CMP of Technisch Creative. Transporation is provided to and from the venue. Tickets are required to attend.

(Bottom right) Alisa Walsh of Haute applauds a speaker at the 2022 Leadership Lunch. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



 *Register Now!*

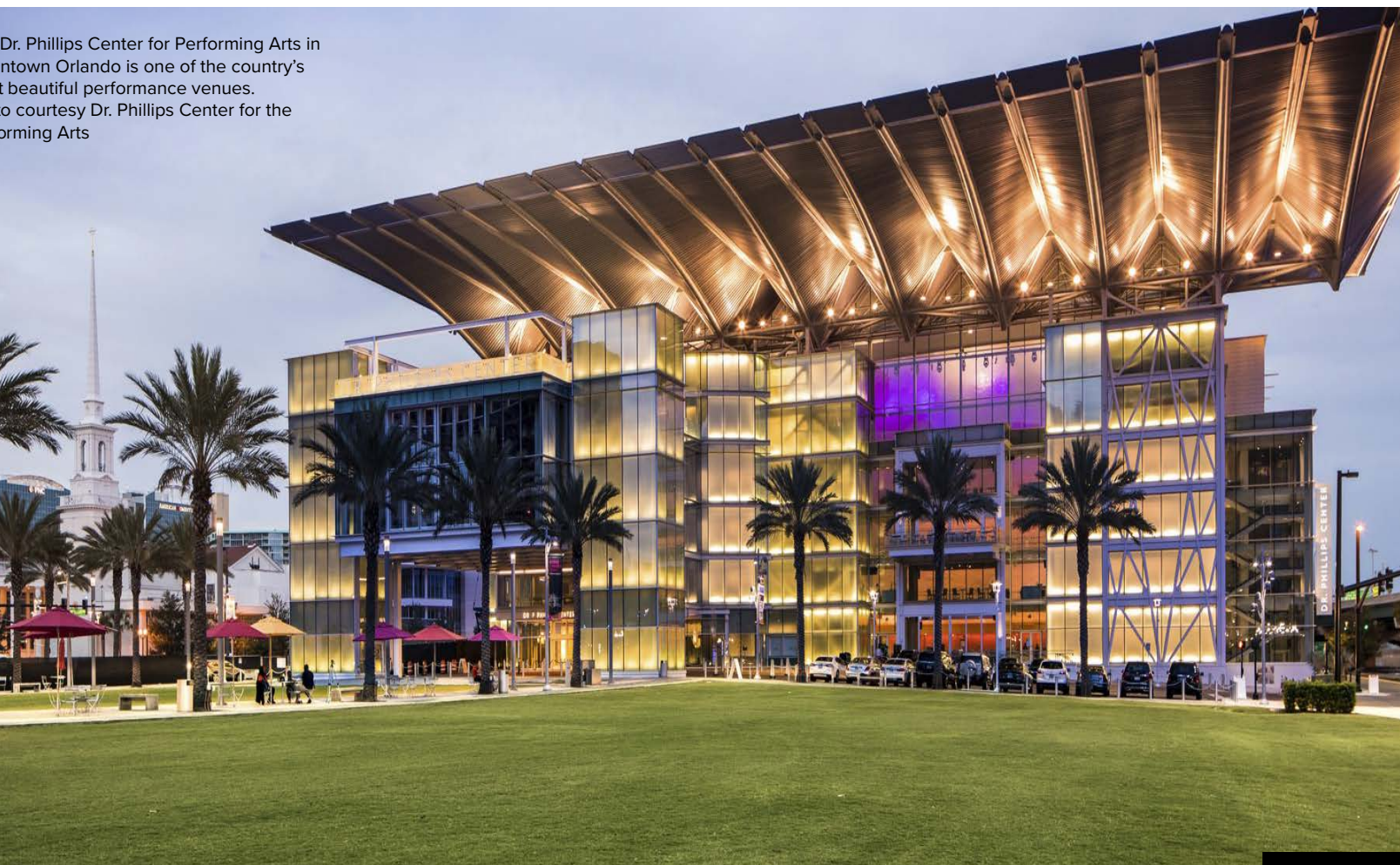


Shel Bayot of The International School of Hospitality presents the Lifetime Achievement Award at last year's CS+TSE Leadership Luncheon. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



The Leadership Lunch is an excellent way to enhance your network while honoring beacons of the events industry. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

Dr. Phillips Center for Performing Arts in downtown Orlando is one of the country's most beautiful performance venues. Photo courtesy Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts



Trend-forward Evening Events



Experience the latest food and beverage trends at the evening events, like this costumed server at last year's CS+TSE. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



After a satisfying day of learning and networking, get ready to spend your evenings having fun! Every evening features a different event theme and venue, all curated to bring you the latest trends in a setting that also grants you the time and space to connect with friends, peers, and colleagues.

(Top and above) Kavas Tacos + Tequila will make up one part of the Opening Night Party's Coastal Fiesta Block Party. Photo courtesy Kavas Tacos + Tequilas

Facing page:

(Top) There will be plenty of photo-worthy moments at the evening events! Shown here: an attendee snaps a selfie with a costumed server at Connect Live 2022. Photo courtesy BYC Photography

(Middle) There's plenty to eat and drink at the evening events! Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

(Bottom) Attendees were all smiles as they experienced music, activity stations, and high-end food and beverage at the Opening Night Party in 2022. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

Monday March 27 • Big Fin Seafood Kitchen

Chair: Jean-Michel Santacreu, JMS Event Design & Production

Kick off your week right by connecting with friends and colleagues at our opening welcome reception **Connect Live** from **7:30 p.m. - 10:30 p.m.**, which brings attendees of Art of Catering Food together with Catersource + The Special Event.

Tuesday March 28 • Hampton Social/Kavas/Pointe Orlando

Chairs: Gabrielle “Gabby” Mourina, Imprint Events Group & Selina Mullinax, CORT Events

It's time to celebrate in the Florida sunshine with colleagues from far and near during the **Opening Night Party** from **7:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.** This year's theme “Coastal Fiesta Block Party” is inspired by the coastal and playful atmosphere of The Hampton Social and the vibrant and cultural experience of Kavas. This block party at The Pointe will be designed to delight the senses. Be sure to move throughout the three indoor and outdoor locations where you'll find exciting entertainment, delicious small bites, and plenty of rosé and reposado. This evening reception will allow you to choose your own adventure and connect with fellow industry professionals to create an unforgettable experience!

Wednesday March 29 • Canvas

This is the night of the premier networking celebration to raise funds for our industry. Join the SEARCH Foundation for their Annual Signature Event and mingle with top industry professionals all while supporting friends and colleagues in crisis.

For those not attending the SEARCH event, this is an evening to hit the town with your teams and peers and enjoy a taste of Orlando. **Here are some restaurants we recommend checking out:**

1. **Four Flamingos, A Richard Blais Florida Kitchen:** This Floribbean-inspired concept restaurant near Walt Disney World® Resort* gives eaters a taste of the state's history and modern coastal flare with a steak- and-seafood-centric menu that features fresh, bold ingredients.
2. **Capa:** Located in the Four Seasons, Capa is a chic Michelin-starred 17th-floor rooftop steakhouse and bar featuring the best of Spanish-influenced cuisine.
3. **The Ravenous Pig:** An American gastropub situated next door to its sister brewery and beer garden, this Southern hub is run by a husband-and-wife team of James Beard-nominated chefs.



Agenda at a Glance

Monday

Venue Tour

1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Connect Live at Big Fin Seafood

7:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.

Tuesday

Conference education

8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Opening Night Party at Hampton/ Social/Kavas/Pointe Orlando

7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Wednesday

Opening General Session

9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. (doors at 8:30 a.m.)

Tradeshow floor

10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

DICED competition

11:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

Conference education

1:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Hall Happy Hour

4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

SEARCH's Annual Signature Event

8:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.

Thursday

Closing General Session

9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. (doors at 8:30 a.m.)

Tradeshow floor

10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Conference education

11:00 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.

Leadership Lunch at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts

11:45 a.m. to 1:45 p.m.

ACE/Gala/CATIE Awards Reception

4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

ACE/Gala/CATIE awards on the Keynote Stage

5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Closing Night Celebration at ICON Park

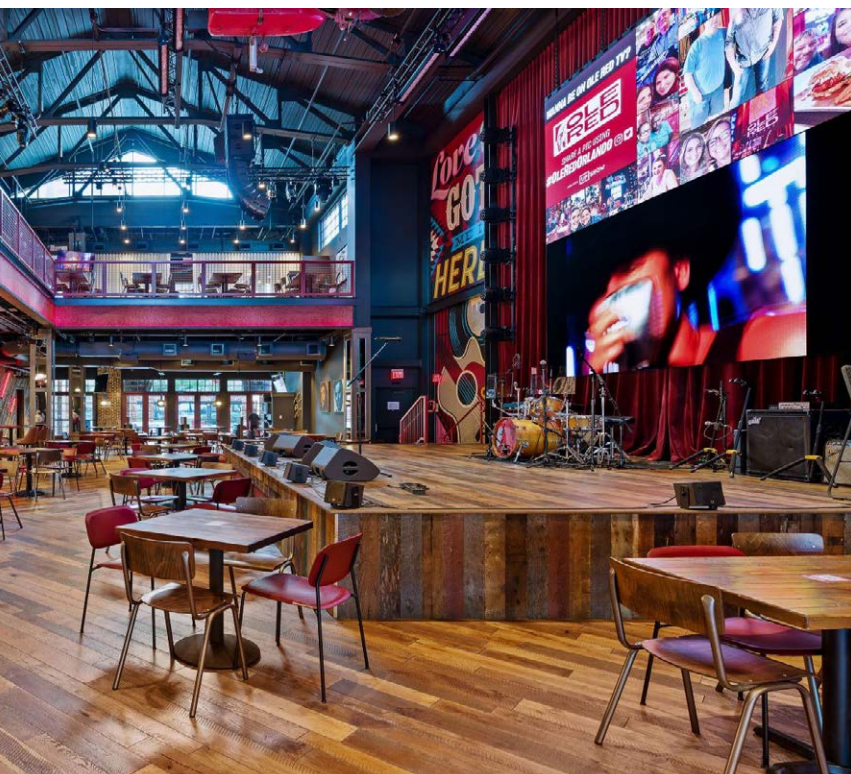
7:30 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.



Register



Evening events are a great time for enjoying entertainment after a long day of learning. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



Ole Red (owned by Blake Shelton) will be part of the Closing Night Celebration's International Block Party. Photo courtesy Ole Red

***Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this article are those of the writer and sources. The writer and sources are not affiliated with the Walt Disney Company, and this article is not authorized or endorsed by the Walt Disney company or any of its affiliates. All Disney-related trademarks are property of Disney Enterprises, Inc.

Now!

4. **Reyes Mezcaleria:** Mezcal is gaining popularity in the U.S., so if you're looking to sip a Oaxacan Old Fashioned while eating regionally-inspired fine Mexican cuisine, this is the place for you.
5. **Prato:** For a rich Italian culinary experience, visit Prato. This stylish eatery combines contemporary design with seasonal ingredients and modern takes on Italian classics.

For more on Orlando's food scene, check out page 34 at the back of this issue in our sister publication *Catersource*. Other activities you can check out (besides the obvious answer of Walt Disney World® Resort*): find your way out of The Escape Game Orlando, get an adrenaline rush at IFLY Indoor Skydiving, shop designer brands at the Mall at Millenia, and pose with the famous figures at Madame Tussauds Orlando.

Thursday March 30 • Ole Red/ Brother Jimmy's BBQ/Tapa Toro

Chairs: Chef Boris Seymore, BDS Catering & Productions & Jenice Stallings,
Styles By Stallings

Celebrate with colleagues amidst an entertainment-filled experience as we wrap up a great week for our industry at the **Closing Night** Celebration from **7:30 p.m. - 10:30 p.m.**

Associations & groups

Associations and groups will be present at Catersource + The Special Event, many of which will also have booths on the Tradeshow Floor and/or in the conference area. Take the time to seek these people out and learn more! We are all in this together and hope to learn from each other. Here's a look for this year:

- **The Academic Event Professional (AEP)**
- **Association for Wedding Professionals International (AFWPI)**
- **Certified Catering Consultants (CCC)**
- **International Association of Conference Centers (IACC)**
- **International Caterers Association (ICA)**
- **International Caterers Association Educational Foundation (ICAEF)**
- **International Live Events Association (ILEA)**
- **Leading Caterers of America (LCA)**
- **Live Events Coalition (LEC)**
- **SEARCH Foundation**
- **Wedding International Professionals Association (WIPA)**
- **Wedding Venue Map**

Industry accolades: award recipients

Catersource + The Special Event 2023 is also the time for our annual ACE, GALA, and ICA CATIE Awards, which will be presented **Thursday evening from 5:30 p.m.–7:00 p.m.**, preceded by a brief keynote address from beloved industry pro Michael Cerbelli. Turn to page 56 to see this year's Gala Award nominees. During the ceremony, *Special Events* will present its highest honor, the Gala Lifetime Achievement Award, to Michael Cerbelli.

An awards nominee reception will precede the ceremony, beginning at 4:30 p.m. This is a great opportunity for networking and supporting some of the industry's movers and shakers. **Here are this year's award recipients:**

The Special Events Lifetime Achievement Award

Michael Cerbelli,
Cerbelli Creative, NY, NY

You probably know him for his signature event, Michael Cerbelli's The Hot List™ or "THL" as it's affectionately nicknamed; a beloved annual session at The Special Event where industry veteran Michael Cerbelli predicted the trends before they happened. Charismatic and quick-witted, Cerbelli is a crowd favorite.

Cerbelli has been in the live events industry for over 44 years, beginning at just age 13 with some turntables and a dream. Being born and raised in Brooklyn, Cerbelli's passion is to do more than create incredible experiences, but to also be an inspiration to the events community. In 2019, Cerbelli was inducted into the event industry Hall



Michael Cerbelli



of Fame by BizBash for his decades of experience working in event design and production, meetings, hospitality and sponsorships, corporate events, rentals, and more.

Cerbelli is the CEO and President of Cerbelli Creative, an iconic industry leader in events and the go-to entertainment producer for (among others) Billy Joel, Robert DeNiro and Sir Paul McCartney. One of his most notable produced events was a multi-million-dollar 'Brooklyn Bar-Mitzvah' at the Barclay Center that captured the attention of global press, from CNN to the BBC.

But Cerbelli doesn't rely on extravagance for his brand. Cerbelli Creative's website confirms the company's approach: "An event doesn't have to be large to be 'big'. It doesn't have to be extravagant to be 'rich' and it doesn't have to be over the top to 'raise the roof'."

Attend the ACE, GALA, and CATIE Awards Ceremony to watch Cerbelli in action.

Michael Roman Lifetime Achievement

Warren Dietel, Puff 'n Stuff Catering Orlando and Tampa FL

You might say Warren Dietel (CEO and Owner of Puff 'n Stuff Catering) knows his way around



Warren Dietel

the catering business. Not only has he worked in the industry since the late 1980s, but he also spent his formative years watching his parents create, manage, and grow the business.

When Dietel purchased the business from his parents in 2003, he hit the ground running. Now 20 years later, although Dietel is stepping back a bit from the day-to-day, he is still inspiring a new generation of committed team members (led by its new president Tracy Vessillo); and he is still the man his team looks to solve any problem (even if he's not physically around). Dietel's career hasn't been all Puff 'n Stuff (although he did begin work there in 1989), he opened his first business (auto detailing) at the age of 16 in his parents' driveway, before taking a job at Walt Disney World® Resort in 1984 in its weddings business, before moving on to the Disney Institute in 2001. After Disney, Dietel went to work at Scott Kay Platinum managing the southern U.S.

Dietel eventually made his way back to Puff 'n Stuff. His priorities were enlarging and strengthening infrastructure and moving operations into a purpose-built production facility by 2006. In 2006, Dietel moved Puff 'n Stuff's operations into a purpose-built production facility, and in 2010 Puff 'n Stuff expanded to the west coast by joining forces with a leading Tampa caterer. Additional commercial real estate ventures, including a couple of Orlando's most popular venues (The MEZZ and The Balcony), followed. In 2014, Dietel opened Chef's Commissary, a wholesale food manufacturer, and then in 2015 a second production facility for Puff 'n Stuff was opened in Tampa.

Puff 'n Stuff Catering is recognized as a national leader in the catering and special event industries with honors including the Catersource ACE Award, ICA CATIE Award for Best Dessert, and Event Solutions Spotlight Award for Catering Company of the Year. Dietel is an active member of several industry associations including ICA, NACE, MPI, FRLA, ECEP, EPCAS, and ILEA, and previously served as a Director for the International Caterers Association.

Read the full profile on Dietel on page 96 in the adjoining *Catersource* magazine.

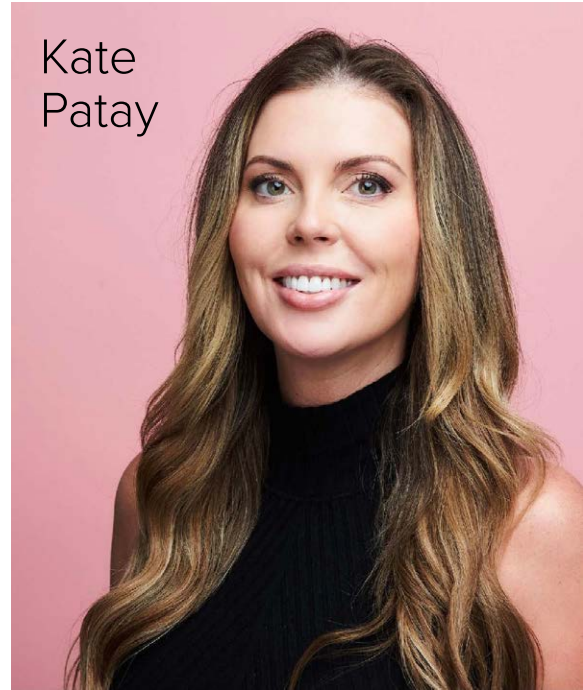
Richard Carbotti Volunteerism Award

Kate Patay, Chairperson, SEARCH Foundation

Kate Patay, CPCE, is the Chief Strategy Officer of Patay Consulting, a firm designed to help businesses and individuals identify their unique brand and voice. She is an international speaker & consultant, SEARCH Foundation Chairwoman and ambassador for Meetings Mean Business. Patay has been a recognized industry professional, brand ambassador and influencer for over 20 years in many facets of live events and has served on the boards of numerous industry organizations. She currently speaks for and coaches some of the top leaders and companies in our industry and beyond. Her list of achievements and recognition is immense, but some highlights are: the coveted Pacesetter Award from the Events Industry Council, the Smart Meetings HOF, and numerous other organizational awards. In 2021 she was recognized as the NACE Icon and one of the Top 25 Women Who Run Events, as well as a Top 20 Global Professional to Follow by Cvent; 2020 brought her praise as one of the 100 Most Influential People in Global Events, Top Keynote Speaker, and a Top 14 Changemaker.

Get to know Kate Patay! Turn to page 66 for a full profile on this industry titan.

Kate
Patay



MeetingsNet Lifetime Achievement (note: this is the first time this award will be presented)

Michael Dominguez, Associated Luxury Hotels International

You can't make a list of meetings industry thought leaders without including Michael Dominguez, president and CEO of Associated Luxury Hotels International.

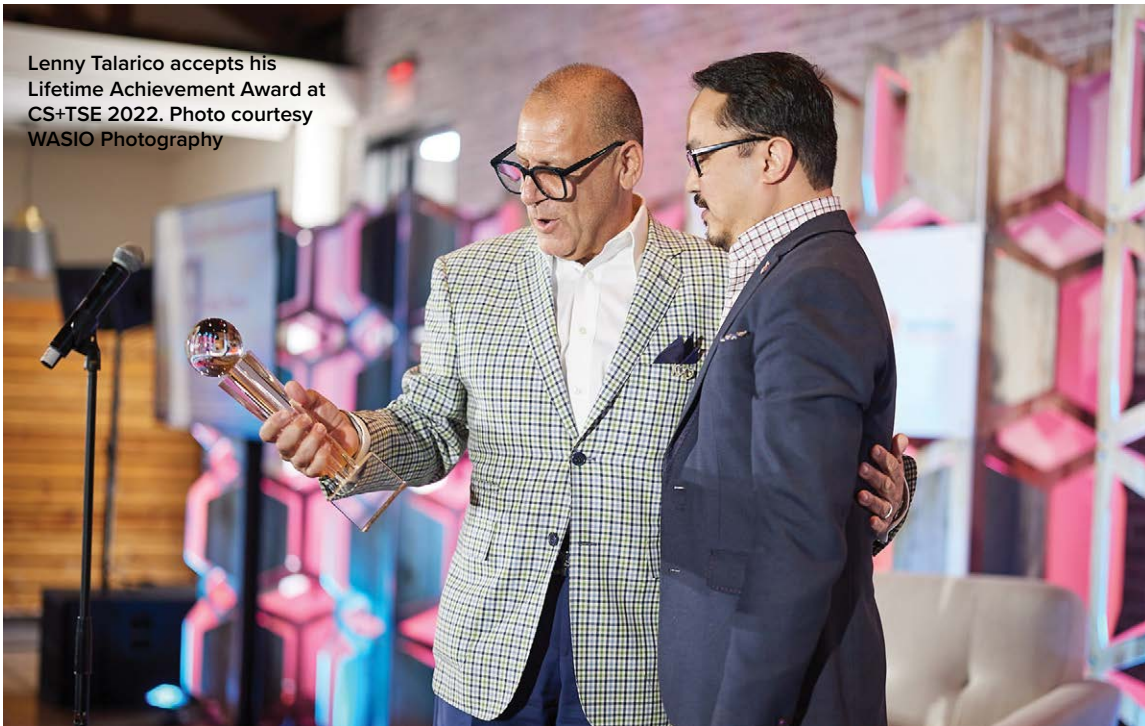
When you think about in-demand educators, Dominguez is at the top of that list, too, with his data-driven sessions detailing the meeting and incentive-travel landscape. He takes an active role in dedicating his time to leading keynote speaking sessions and contributing to numerous articles that provide thoughtful insight, tips, and tools for the MICE industry.

He's also among the leaders who, again and



Michael
Dominguez

Lenny Talarico accepts his Lifetime Achievement Award at CS+TSE 2022. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography



again, have volunteered their time for industry associations. If you drew a Venn diagram of board members over the past decade who have served Meeting Professionals International, U.S. Travel Association, Meetings Mean Business Coalition, Global Business Travel Association Foundation, and Financial and Insurance Conference Professionals Hospitality Partners Advisory Committee, Dominguez's smiling face would be at the intersection.

He's earned the respect of colleagues across the industry and approaches his roles with an energy and optimism that is infectious.

For all these reasons, MeetingsNet is honoring Dominguez with its first-ever Lifetime Achievement Award.

Outside of this award, Dominguez has been recognized for his contributions: perhaps most notably, the Event Industry Council inducted him into its Hall of Leaders in 2019. MeetingsNet applauds his service to the community and his professionalism.

Congratulations to our recipients! Come show your support and uplift these outstanding industry professionals at the Awards Ceremony Thursday, March 30th at 5:30 p.m.



A cocktail hour will precede the Awards Ceremony. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

Earn Education Credits

Continuing education is an important aspect of any career trajectory and Catersource + The Special Event is ready to help. All classes have been certified for CMP (Certified Meeting Professionals) credit.

New this year! The Event Escape

This year we're bringing in brand activations in the form of immersive "escape" rooms, where you'll be able to create memorable moments and share photo ops on social media for all your friends and followers to see.

CS+TSE 2024: Uncover Austin, TX, Room W332

**Open Tuesday through Thursday
during regular show hours**

It's no longer a secret! Catersource + The Special Event will head next to Austin, TX in 2024! Austin is known as the Live Music Capital of the World®, but, oh—it is so much more than that. This genuinely unique destination, the capital city of the Lone Star State, has a soundtrack all its own, weaving in art, culture, incredible food, and breathtaking outdoor activities. Step into this event escape and learn about the city, enjoy activities, and pick up a little Texas twang while you're at it.

Wellness Lounge, Room W333

**Open Tuesday through Thursday during
regular show hours**

Need some time to recharge your internal batteries? Head to the wellness lounge, where soothing music, beautiful scents, and comfortable seating awaits. This isn't a room for chatty interaction, but a place to reflect and recharge. This escape will also be the gathering spot for morning pilates sessions, Charessa Sawyer's event therapy class on Thursday at 11:00 a.m., and much more. Come relax, unwind, and breathe deeply before rejoining sessions and stepping onto the exhibit hall floor.

Don't miss Michelle Howard's floral design session on Tuesday at 4:00 p.m. and/or her hands-on Tablescape session on the tradeshow floor at 11:15 on Wednesday!

Floral Design Lab, Room W334

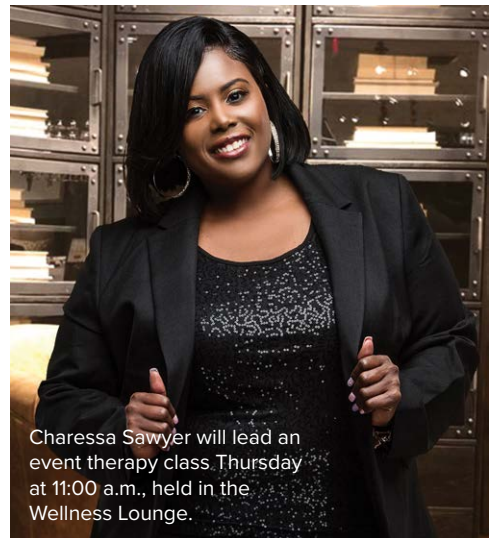
**Open at various times Tuesday through
Thursday during regular show hours**

Observe florists Michelle Howard of Flora Couture and Mylo Lopez of Mylo Fleur (both Las Vegas, NV) construct beautiful pieces they will showcase in their Tuesday afternoon session *Let's Talk Floral 1.1* (230C, 4:00 p.m.). Come on in and converse with these two artists and their teams, or stop and smell the roses! Same goes for Wednesday, as they ready their florals for the *Hands on Tablescape Design Competition* session on the exhibit hall floor (11:15 a.m. back right of exhibit hall). If you have ever wanted to see how florists work and/or be a part of their world, this is the escape you have been dreaming of!

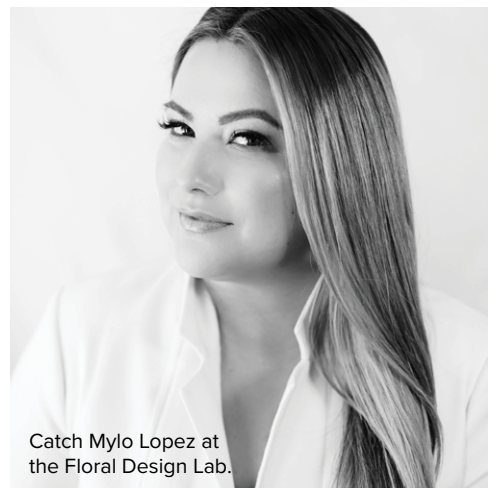
Don't miss this exciting new addition! ●



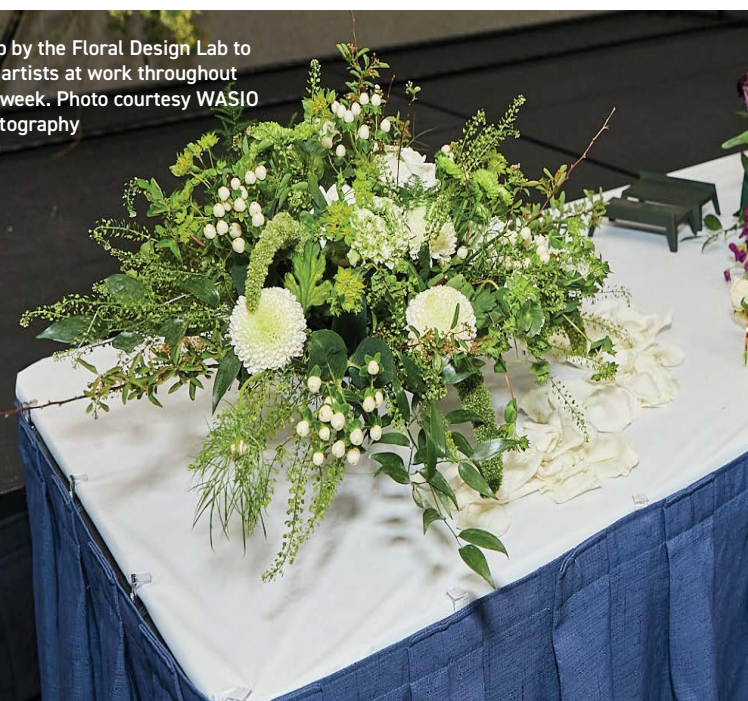
Catersource + The Special Event 2024 is headed to Austin. Stop by the Uncover Austin Escape Room for a sneak peak!



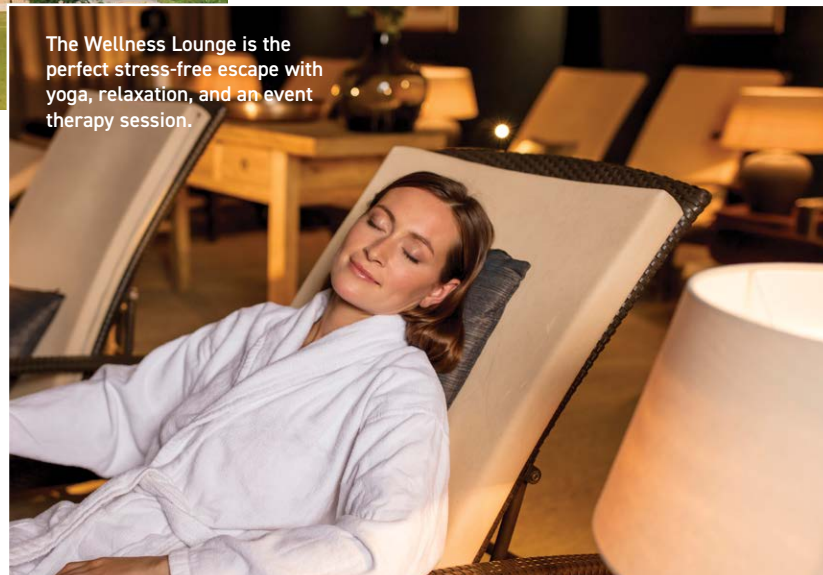
Charessa Sawyer will lead an event therapy class Thursday at 11:00 a.m., held in the Wellness Lounge.



Catch Mylo Lopez at the Floral Design Lab.



by the Floral Design Lab to artists at work throughout week. Photo courtesy WASIO tography



The Wellness Lounge is the perfect stress-free escape with yoga, relaxation, and an event therapy session.

 *Register Now!*

And the NOMINEES ARE...

Let's give a round of applause to this year's
Gala Award nominees!

by Amber Kispert

The **Gala Awards** are back this year and the nominees are stronger than ever!

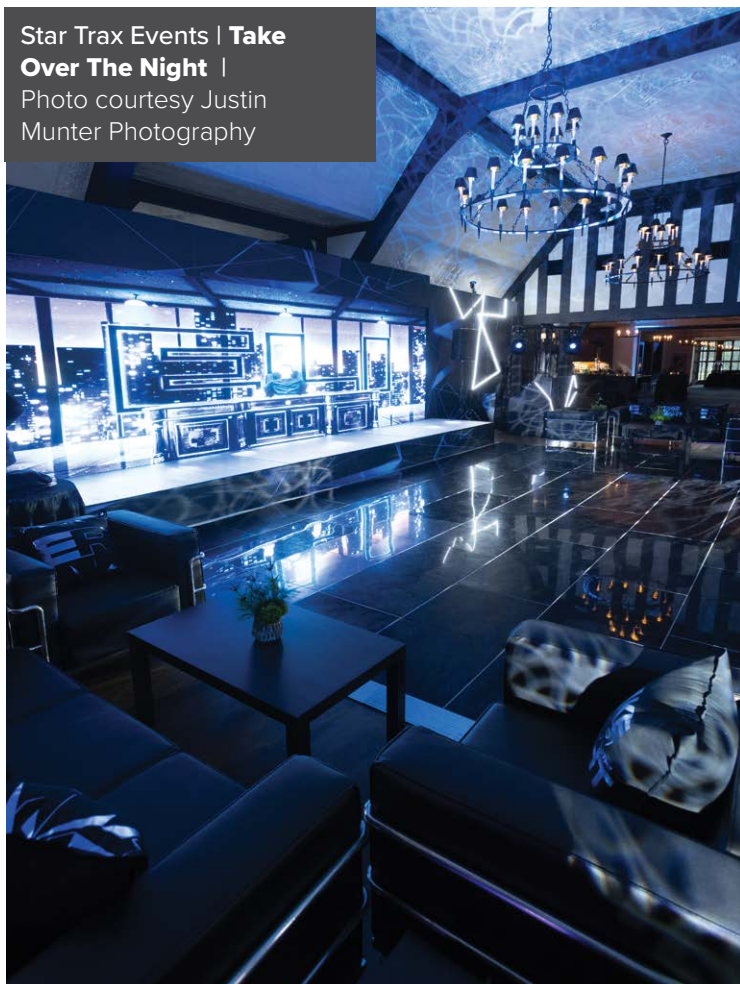
Special Events magazine is delighted to announce the nominees for the **2023 Gala Awards**, which will be awarded during **Catersource + The Special Event on March 30th in Orlando, FL**. *Catersource* magazine will also be honoring companies with its **ACE Awards**. Turn to page 70 in the accompanying magazine for this year's nominees.

Please congratulate your 2023 Gala nominees!

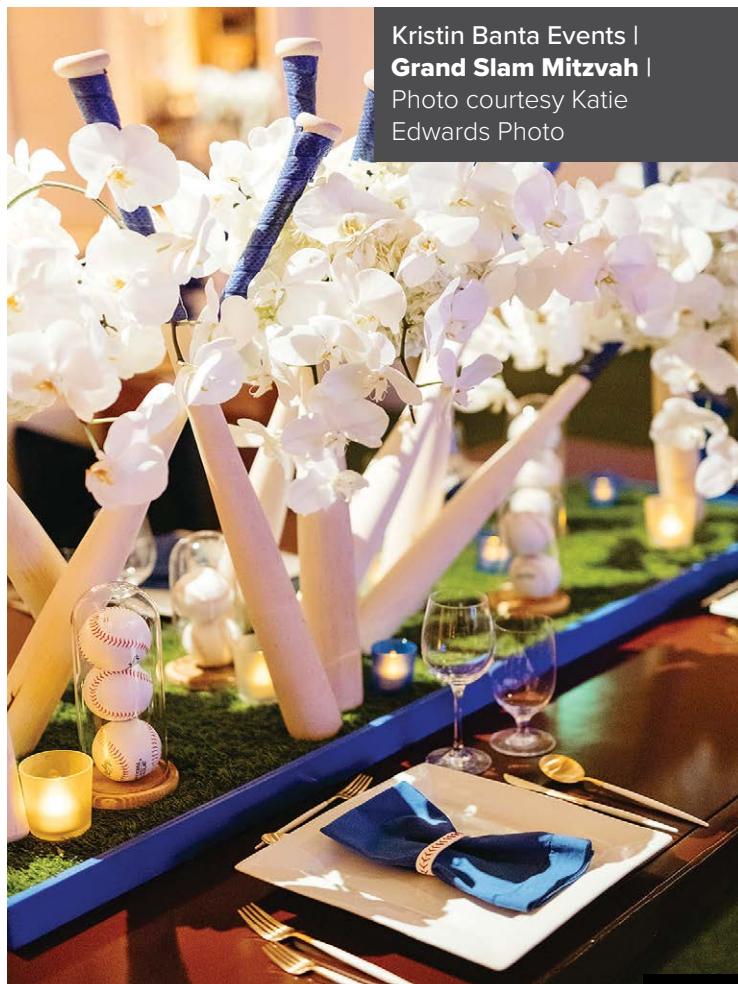
BEST EVENT FOR A PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL



Lenny Talarico Events and
KG Consulting & Event
Agency | **Uncommons
VIP Opening** | Photo
courtesy Joe Durkin



Star Trax Events | **Take
Over The Night** |
Photo courtesy Justin
Munter Photography



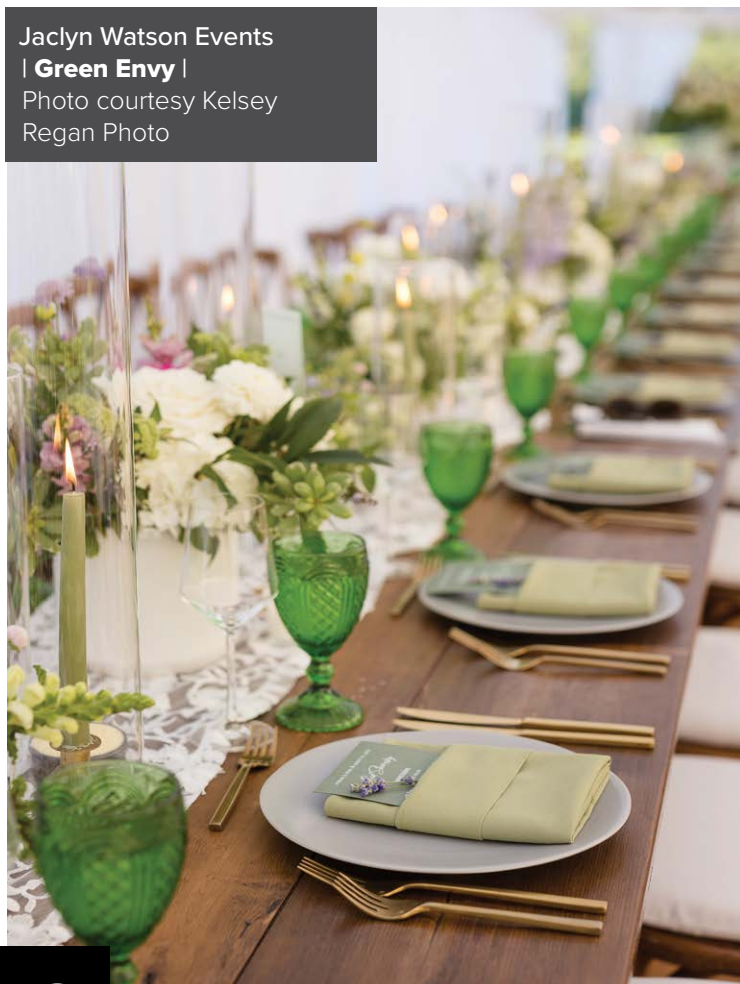
Kristin Banta Events |
Grand Slam Mitzvah |
Photo courtesy Katie
Edwards Photo

BEST WEDDING



Kristin Banta Events |
Glam Enchanted Forest |
Photo courtesy John &
Joseph Photography

Jaclyn Watson Events
| **Green Envy** |
Photo courtesy Kelsey
Regan Photo



Jaclyn Watson Events |
An Oceanside Story |
Photo courtesy Rodeo & Co

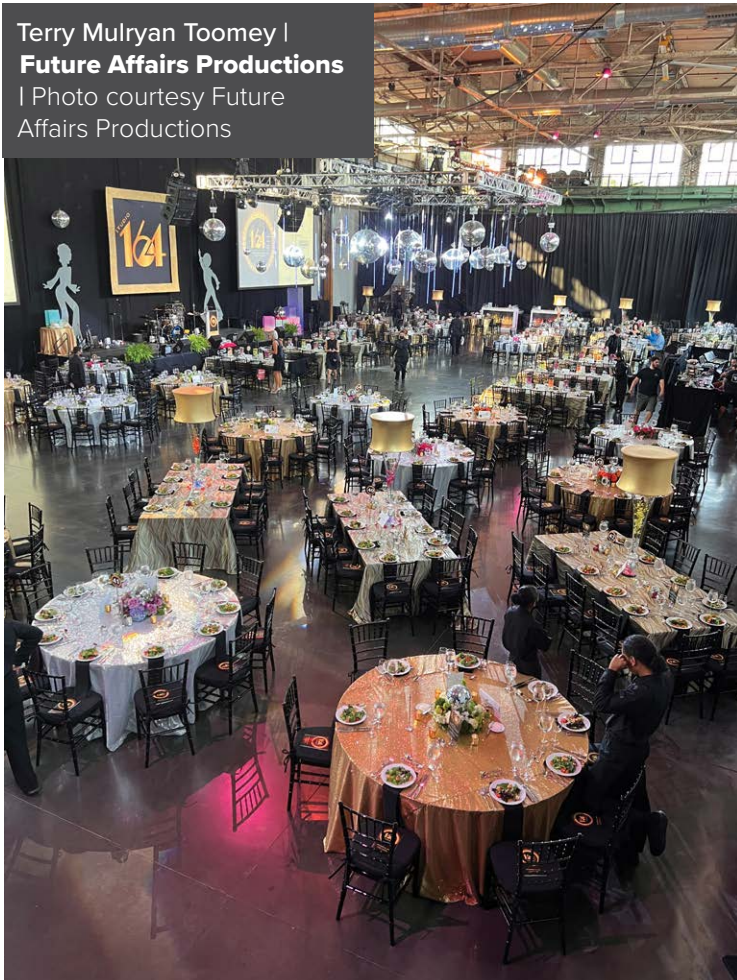


DESIGNER OF THE YEAR



Kristin Banta | **Kristin Banta Events** | Photo courtesy John & Joseph Photography

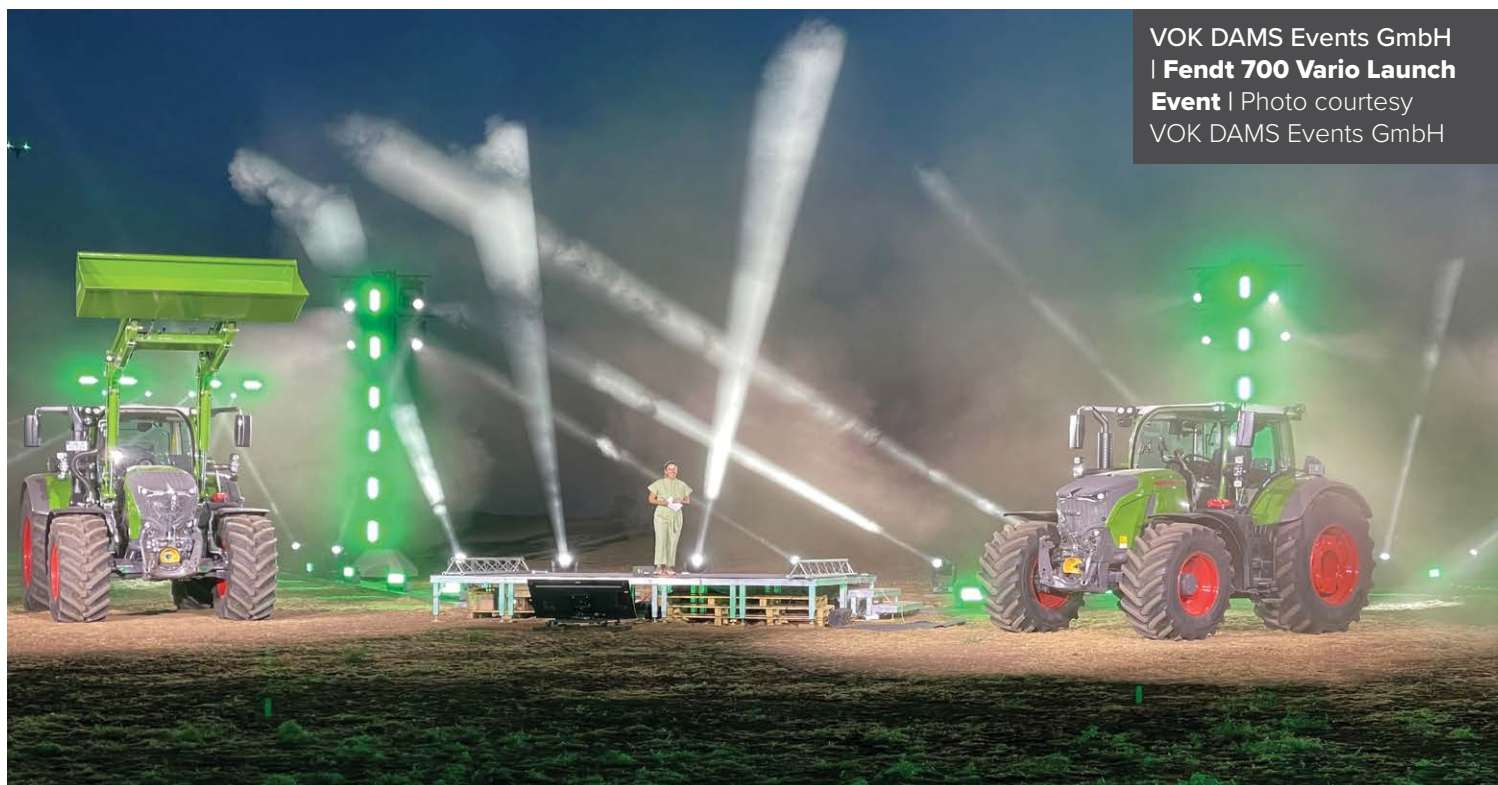
Terry Mulryan Toomey | **Future Affairs Productions** | Photo courtesy Future Affairs Productions



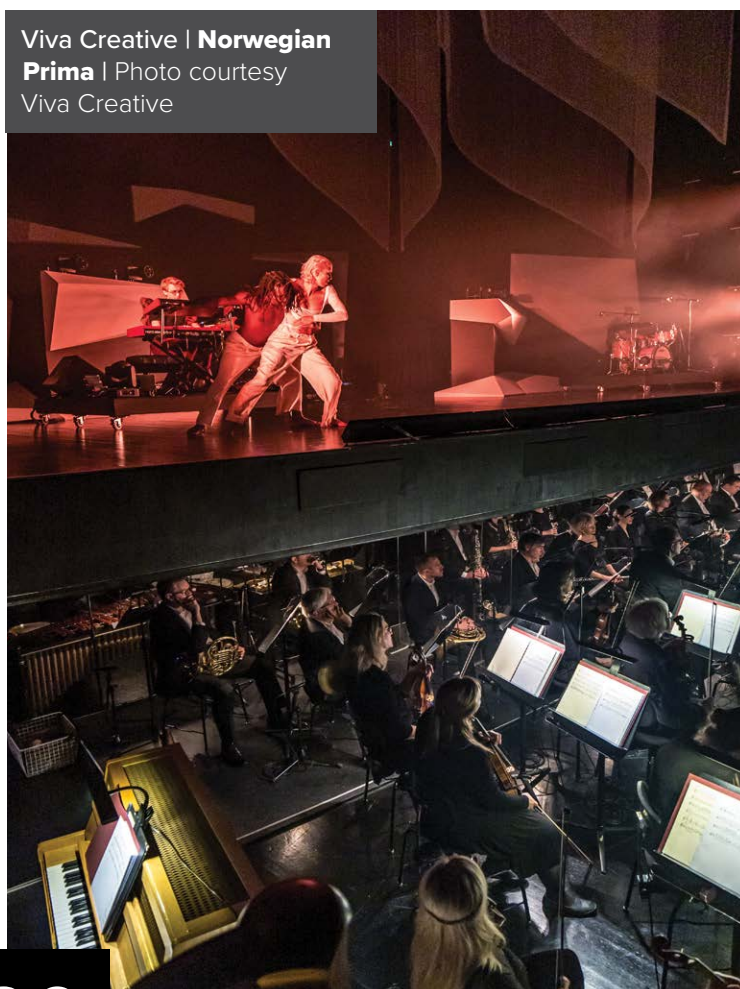
Jaclyn Watson | **Jaclyn Watson Events** | Photo courtesy Rodeo & Co



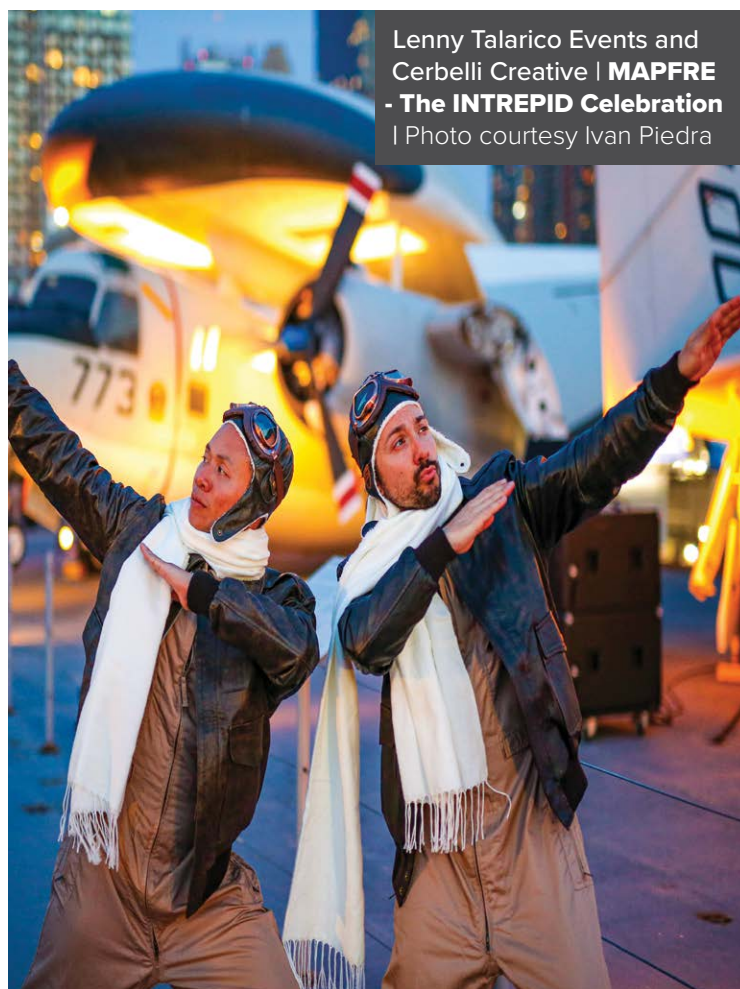
BEST EVENT PRODUCED FOR A CORPORATION OR ASSOCIATION



VOK DAMS Events GmbH
| **Fendt 700 Vario Launch
Event** | Photo courtesy
VOK DAMS Events GmbH



Viva Creative | **Norwegian
Prima** | Photo courtesy
Viva Creative

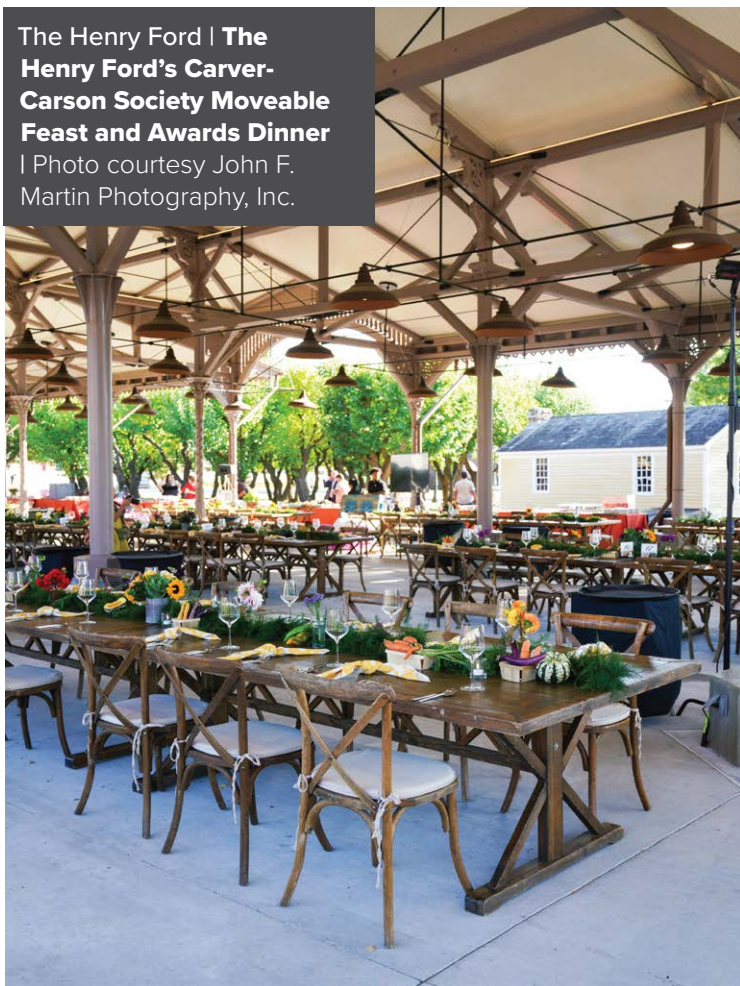


Lenny Talarico Events and
Cerbelli Creative | **MAPFRE
- The INTREPID Celebration**
| Photo courtesy Ivan Piedra

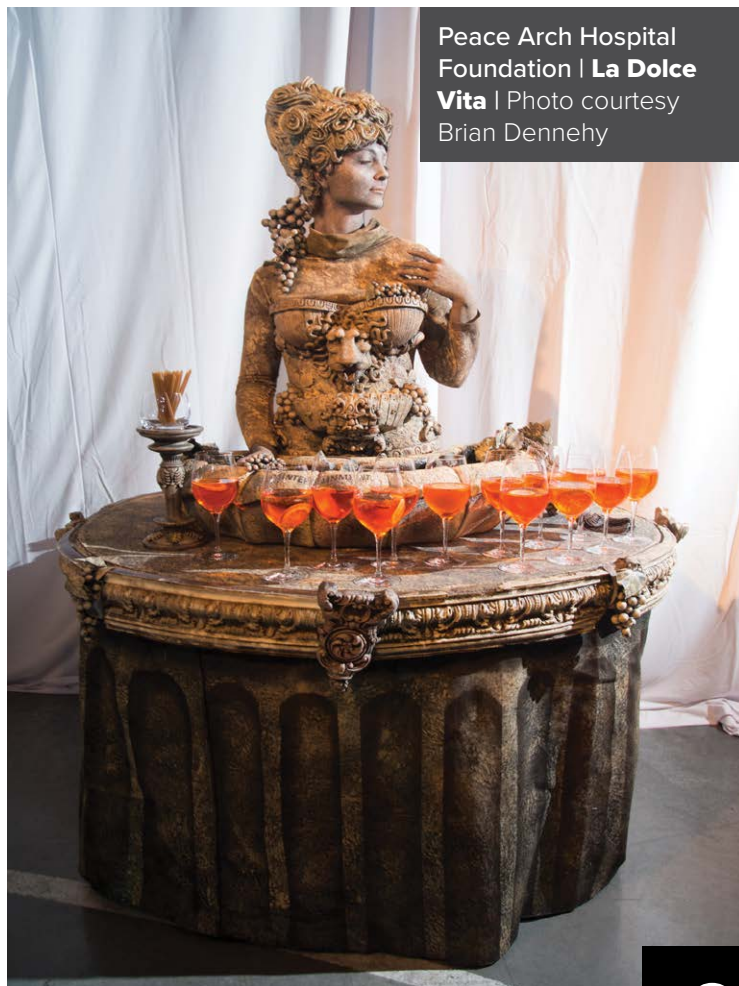


Insglueck | BIOTOPIA /
**German Garden / Floriade
Expo 2022** | Photo courtesy
keller-fotografie.de

The Henry Ford | **The
Henry Ford's Carver-
Carson Society Moveable
Feast and Awards Dinner**
| Photo courtesy John F.
Martin Photography, Inc.



Peace Arch Hospital
Foundation | **La Dolce
Vita** | Photo courtesy
Brian Dennehy



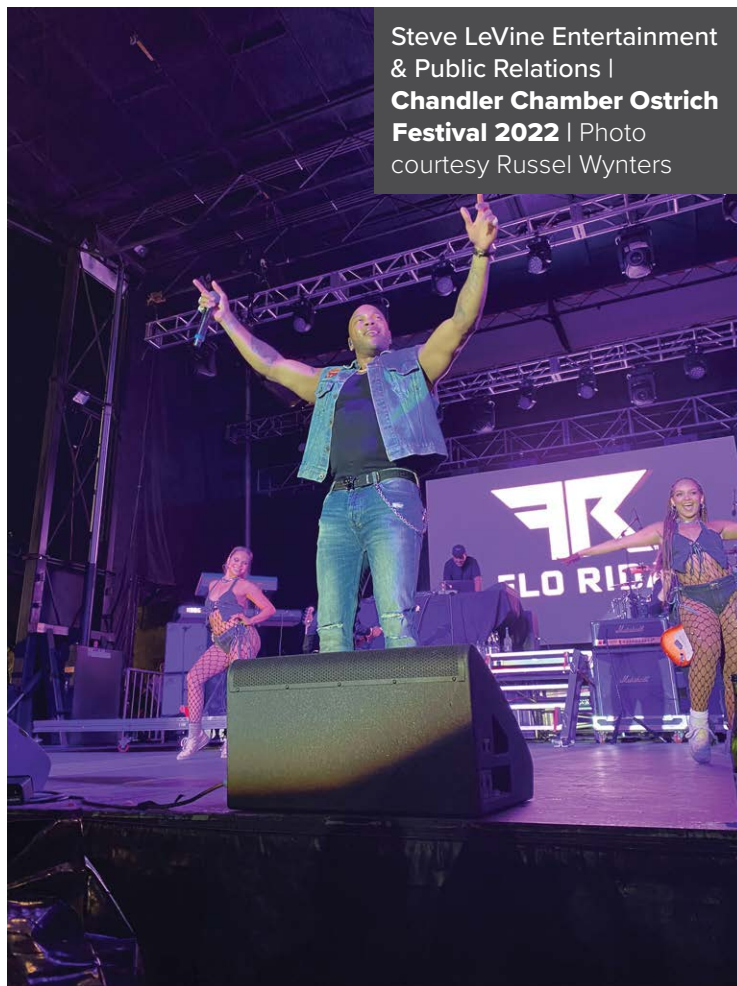
BEST MULTIPLE-DAY EVENT PROGRAM FOR A CORPORATION OR ASSOCIATION



LEO Events | **Walmart Associates' Week** | Photo courtesy LEO Events



RED VELVET | **Jimmy John's Château JéJé** | Photo courtesy Holly Cowart



Steve LeVine Entertainment & Public Relations | **Chandler Chamber Ostrich Festival 2022** | Photo courtesy Russel Wynters

MOST OUTSTANDING SPECTACLE, FAIR, OR FESTIVAL



VOK DAMS Events GmbH
| **Fendt 700 Vario Launch Event** | Photo courtesy
VOK DAMS Events GmbH

Insglueck | BIOTOPIA /
German Garden / **Floriade Expo 2022** | Photo courtesy
keller-fotografie.de



Insglueck | **Kazakhstan Pavilion Expo 2020 - Gateway to Tomorrow**
| Photo courtesy
Andreas Keller



BEST ENTERTAINMENT



Insglueck | **Kazakhstan Pavilion Expo 2020 - Mainshow "Unlimited Space"** | Photo courtesy Andreas Keller

Metropolis Productions | **Mary Kay Seminar 2022** | Photo courtesy Metropolis Productions



Metropolis Productions | **Mary Kay Leadership Conference 2022** | Photo courtesy Metropolis Productions



FLORIDA SUNSHINE TOUR - 2023



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CATERING **FOOD**

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OF AMERICA

ACE & GRALA
AWARDS

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SEARCH
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ILEA
INTERNATIONAL
LIVE EVENTS ASSOCIATION

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The SEARCH is Over

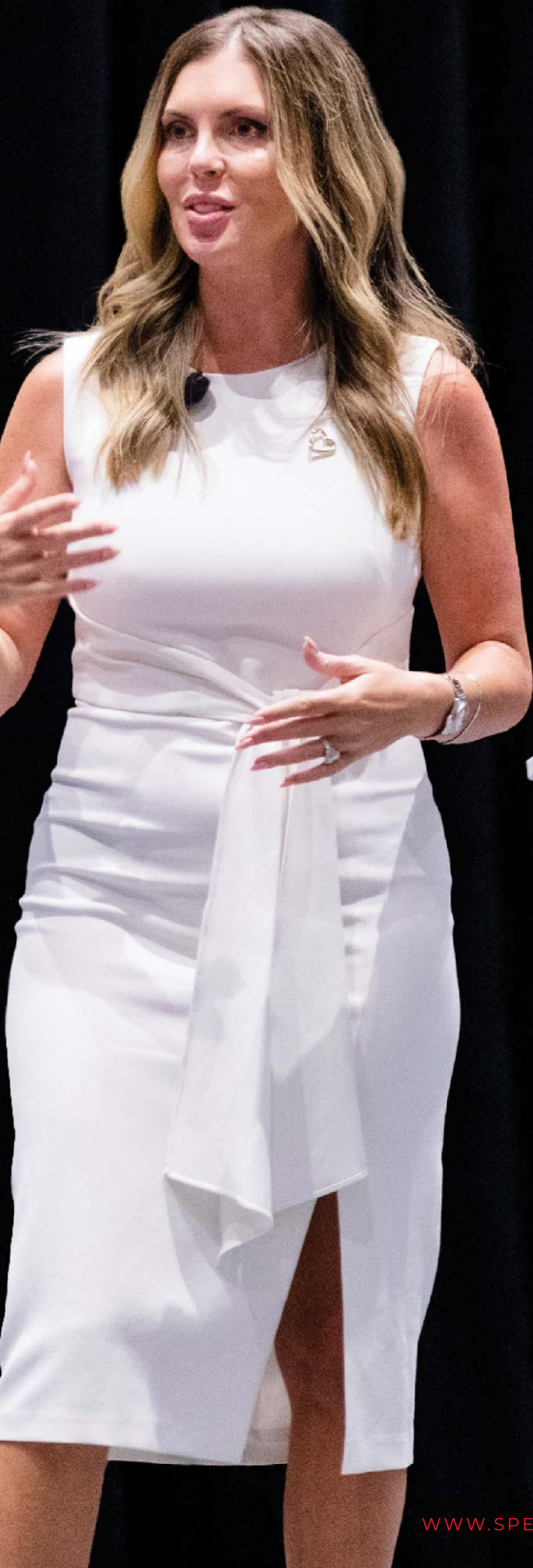
SEARCH Foundation chairwoman
Kate Patay Named 2023 Richard Carbotti
Volunteerism Award Recipient

By Amanda Nicklaus

To Kate Patay, CPCE and Chief Strategy Officer of Patay Consulting, the events industry isn't just a rewarding profession; it's a multifaceted field of work that uses creativity to bring people together. Her success lies in her ability to make connections and find the right strategies, or as she puts it, "putting together all of the puzzle pieces to create magic." You might say that seeing every nuance and side of a project is her superpower.

Kate Patay speaking at Catersource + The Special Event in 2021, true to her dedication to educate and elevate the industry. Photo courtesy WTA Photo via SpotMyPhotos

“I didn’t have a lot of resources readily available to me early in my career, so I’ve made it my mission to knowledge-share at every possible opportunity.”



"I'm almost compulsive in my desire to design solutions for the most complex of requests," says Patay. "We are one of the most creative industries on the planet and if there is a way to make it happen, I will find it—my own curiosity and pushing boundaries and perceived limits motivates me."

The events industry isn't the only thing that's multifaceted; Patay herself wears many hats, taking on different roles in the industry. Besides leading her consulting business and engagement for a top global DMC, she's served on several boards of industry organizations, including her current role as chairperson of the SEARCH Foundation. She's an influencer, brand ambassador, speaker, and coach, and she holds a host of honors and awards, among them the coveted Pacesetter Award from the Events Industry Council, the Smart Meetings Hall Of Fame, and numerous other organizational awards. In 2021 she was recognized as the NACE Icon and one of the Top 25 Women Who Run Events, as well as a Top 20 Global Professional to Follow by Cvent; 2020 brought her praise as one of the 100 Most Influential People in Global Events, Top Keynote Speaker, and a Top 14 Changemaker.

She's paving her path in the industry and it shows; Patay is the recipient of this year's Richard Carbotti Volunteerism Award, and she will be honored in Orlando, FL during Catersource + The Special Event Awards Ceremony on Thursday evening, March 30.

A bit of everything

Patay's start in the event industry began in catering and conventions, but as a people-person, it's no surprise she was drawn toward events and meetings. She gained experience as a supplier and producer, where she developed skills in sales and marketing, branding, rebranding, and profitably growing businesses.

Her "people-centric qualities," as she puts it, have led Patay to a full-time role as VP of Engagement for Terramar, A DMC Network Company. Outside of this role, Patay works with event companies to elevate their service standards and/or brand within the industry. She also uses her notoriety to represent brands she believes in.

"When you truly stand behind a company or a product it's natural to want to share that resource, which I happily do when I find one! I think that's what people appreciate—that I walk my talk and I won't promote something just for a paycheck. If I'm putting my name on it, it's because I believe in it."

As if that weren't enough to keep her busy, Patay is a sought-after speaker, using her insights to help enlighten industry professionals. "When I speak it's always topics that I'm passionate about and are relevant to the current climate and improving ourselves as leaders and individuals," she says. "I didn't have a lot of resources readily available to me early in my career, so I've made it my mission to knowledge-share at every possible opportunity."





Kate Patay facilitated the conversation with Closing General Keynote Speaker Roy Choi at Catersource + The Special Event in 2022. Photo courtesy WASIO Photography

“You can’t lead with your ego. I’ve planned and produced some of the most talked about events, but I’ve always shined the spotlight on the team...because none of us are successful alone.”

Her secret ingredient: *teamwork*

Tying together all her roles is a deep passion for elevating the industry. For Patay, leadership isn’t about doing it all but about connecting the right people to make a stellar team.

“While I’m well versed in many facets of events, I know that I can’t do it all and I believe in always hiring the right person for the job. I can’t arrange a gorgeous bouquet of flowers or get that perfect angle on a photo, but I can find you 50 people who can in a timely manner and on budget.”

This team-minded value is at the center of her work. She believes that at the core of the events industry is “a lot of humble service and learning that to be successful, you can’t lead with your ego. I’ve planned and produced some of the most talked about events, but I’ve always shined the spotlight on the team...because none of us are successful alone. It’s not about me.”

Patay’s love of creativity drives her approach to coaching and assisting others in producing top-tier events. “It’s about the moment the client’s face lights up as their boss tells them ‘great job’ for such a spectacular event. It’s connecting the attendees in the moment and wowing them,” she says. “Engaging guests while creating community and inspiring the event team to find a way to make the answer always ‘yes’ means I’m doing my job.”

It's Time to Celebrate

Join us in celebrating this year's Leadership Award recipients at our annual Awards Ceremony on Thursday, March 30 at 5:30 p.m. on the Keynote Stage. A nominee reception will be held from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. in the Orange County Convention Center Lobby.

Considered by many to be the Oscars night of the events and catering industry, during the Awards Ceremony the ACE, Gala, and CATIE awards are bestowed upon the best of the best in our industry. Cheer on the nominees and applaud award recipients as they take the stage to accept our industry's highest honors! With a kickoff keynote by Michael Cerbelli and lifetime achievement and volunteerism awards added to this event, this will be an unforgettable evening.

Congratulations to this year's winners and we look forward to celebrating with everyone this March!

More information can be found at informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/awards-ceremony/

Doing the right thing

Patay's impactful leadership is a direct result of her belief in doing the right thing. "I'm a girl from Buffalo who works her butt off and tries to always do the right thing. I think that's the common denominator in all my achievements—doing the right thing even if it isn't the easiest option."

She cites a quote by Oprah Winfrey as being a guiding light throughout her career: "Let excellence be your brand.... When you are excellent, you become unforgettable. Doing the right thing, even when nobody knows you're doing the right thing, will always bring the right thing to you."

For Patay, doing the right thing includes giving back to the industry that has nourished her career. "In the alphabet soup of our industry, I've volunteered time, donated services, funded initiatives, and worked with boards and organizations to help guide progress in the various disciplines within our industry. A very smart woman told me early in my career that if something meant a lot to me that I would find a way to make time for it... she was right."

With so much on her plate, Patay lets passion determine how she divvies up her time: "I've learned that if I'm not passionate about something to say 'no' to it because they won't be getting 100% from me."

Leading the SEARCH Foundation

Patay's current role of chairperson for the SEARCH Foundation is one to which she gives 100% of herself, a role she says she is most honored to serve. When first introduced to the organization at The Special Event in 2010, she learned about how they assist industry individuals in crisis and has been a supporter ever since. "I'll admit, when I first walked into that room and saw event icons at every turn I was wowed. Then I learned what SEARCH did and I was moved."

Patay stepped into the role of chairperson in November 2019, just before the world descended into the pandemic, demonstrating her ability to lead an industry through the toughest times. She says that she gained insight, perspective, and deep connections from this experience, and as if to confirm her effective leadership, was recently elected to her second term in the role.

"When we come to that table it's as servants of our industry and I'm so proud to have a seat at that table. I'm grateful for everyone that has come before me, and I hope to leave a legacy that inspires others to help individuals when they need it most."

Editor's note: Join the SEARCH Foundation at Catersource + The Special Event in Orlando on Wednesday March 29 at 8:00 p.m. for their [Annual Signature Event](#) and mingle with top industry professionals all while supporting friends and colleagues in crisis.

Kate Patay (center) was elected chairwoman of the SEARCH Foundation in November 2019 and continues leading in that role today. Photo courtesy John Wolfsohn Photography and Video



Kate Patay made quite the entrance during the SEARCH party at CS+TSE 2021. Photo courtesy WTA Photo via SpotMyPhotos

Only the beginning

The future looks busier than ever for Patay, who's beginning some new projects.

"I'm working with a new team and starting bigger conversations about our industry, how we define success, work/life balance, and trying to get us off that list as the fifth most stressful job in the world."

With so many roles and projects, you may wonder where all Patay's energy comes from—and you'll find it comes back to that passion for the industry.

"I'm not wearing 'busy' as a badge of honor, but working to be purposeful and intentional in all of my projects ... and yes, there is so much more to come," she says. "I feel like I'm just getting started!" ●

Hear from Kate Patay at Catersource + The Special Event!

You might recognize Patay from last year's CS+TSE—she led the conversation with Keynote Speaker Roy Choi.

This year, you can catch her at the Leadership Lunch on Thursday, March 30 at 11:45 a.m. at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts.

The Courage to Change

"Change the way you look at things and the things you look at change."

Enhance your Orlando experience by traveling with industry leaders to one of the country's most beautiful performance venues, the Dr. Phillips Center for Performing Arts in Downtown Orlando. Prepare your palate for an innovative menu that will change the way you think about upscale cuisine and listen to the stories of dramatic career change from two of the industry's most iconic leaders, Lenny Talarico, CSEP and Kate Patay, CPCE. More information can be found at <https://schedule.catersource.com/session/leadership-lunch/889494>

18th Annual DMC SPOTLIGHT

Highlighting the top brands in the world of DMCs

We asked, you decided: with travel and destination events being a top priority for so many after the years of pandemic isolation we all endured, DMCs are having a moment, and they deserve recognition. ***Here are some of the biggest brands in the DMC world***—the experts with insider access to the best destinations on earth.

UNDER \$5 MILLION ANNUAL REVENUE

ACCENT NEW ORLEANS, INC., A DMC NETWORK COMPANY

New Orleans, LA

www.accent-dmc.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Diane B. Lyons, CMP, DMCP, President

**Average Number of Programs/
Events Per Year:** 50

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$1.5 Million

Capabilities: ACCENT New Orleans, Inc. has been creating exemplary, innovative events that embody their clients' visions and exceed expectations for 31 years. As a full-service event planning and destination management company, the team at ACCENT New Orleans specializes in event planning, from incentive and corporate events, galas, and receptions to virtual and hybrid events. ACCENT works with clients to incorporate the "only in New Orleans moments" and

entertainment that fit their event: local talent, interactive entertainers, parades, marching bands, artists, caricaturists, and speakers.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: In 2022, ACCENT's nimble team of five full-time employees supported and executed 67 programs. One exceptionally noteworthy event: the company received a call from a colleague in Florida about an event in New Orleans to take place two weeks later. The March 2022 dates were during the busy festival season and NCAA Final Four Tournament. With limited resources after the pandemic and a quick turnaround, there was no time for a site visit—plus the client was traveling internationally so communication was hard. Challenges were overcome, and ACCENT produced two evening events as well as a private chef demo for execs that turned into a full dinner the day before. In the end the client was thrilled, and attendees had a wonderful time! Strong relationships helped secure the business and execute the event.

Trends to Watch: The most important trend for DMCs is technology which streamlines operations and enhances the attendee experience. Artificial intelligence (AI) is the most popular trend in meetings and events. With this technology, DMCs save time and money by automating tedious tasks like registration and check-in, as well as providing more accurate data for planning and making decisions. AI can also help create more engaging and interactive experiences for attendees by providing personalized recommendations and content. Additionally, AI can be used to analyze data from an event for efficiencies and insights. AI is revolutionizing the meetings and events industry; however, it doesn't replace the DNA of DMC management, which is the relationship between client and suppliers.



CHICAGO IS..., A GLOBAL DMC PARTNER

Chicago, IL

www.chicagois.com

Top Officer Name & Title:

Katherine Kirk Fenech, CEO and Managing Partner

**Average Number of Programs/
Events Per Year:** 75

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$4.2
Million

Capabilities: Chicago Is... primarily serves the Chicagoland area with additional service in the Midwest. In the 47 years Chicago Is... has been in business, they have functioned as a boutique DMC. The company is known for matching the perfect local solutions, planning, and logistic support with the creative touch to provide a seamless and memorable guest experience. Their principal event focus is Corporate, Association, and Incentive Programs. Chicago Is... has had the opportunity to expand within

those categories offering a greater scope of services. Chicago Is... ever evolving to stay ahead of trends and cultivate seamless new services before the client even knows they have the need. The company is looking forward to a successful 2023 with more contracts secured before the first quarter than in any past year!

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: The Chicago Is... Team saw an explosion of program requests in 2022, with 75 programs produced at the conclusion of 2022. One challenging event had a quick turnaround when a client requested an 800-person dine-around. The challenge was to find

restaurants within walking distance of a downtown hotel, within budget, still available six weeks prior to the event start date and bidding out to three DMCs.

In another case, a client only mentioned once they were touring onsite that they needed a larger group. The team pivoted quickly to also show spaces that would work for the larger event. With quick thinking they were able to showcase unique venues that fit the client's out-of-the-box meeting needs, and a small 20K program quickly grew to 150K+.

Another event success: Chicago Is... met a new client at IMEX Vegas in 2021. While she had never



Chicago Is... was **AMAZING FROM START TO FINISH**. They went above and beyond with our off-site catering event. I would highly recommend their team for any project.

Chicago Is... was great to work with. They really jumped in last minute to make our event a **SUCCESS**.

Chicago Is... was fantastic!! They had us all situated and were on top of everything. Their pieces were the only thing **I DIDN'T HAVE TO WORRY** about and they came through.

I would like to thank the Chicago Is... team for your exceptional service last week during our Rewards Trip. The program services were all **FIRST-CLASS**.

CHICAGO IS
A GLOBAL DMC PARTNER
our kind of town

CHICAGOIS.COM
THE PREMIERE MIDWEST EVENT PRODUCTION COMPANY

18TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT

worked with a DMC before, the team stepped in, and after the event, the client said she would use a DMC on all her programs moving forward.

Trends to Watch: The biggest trend will be a continuation of the short turnaround programs. First, clients are still playing catch-up and cannot get ahead of their planning schedule. Second, C-Suite decision makers are apprehensive to pull the trigger on events and wait until they feel comfortable with the market. This second indicator fuels the first, creating a cycle that will take time to rectify.

A second trend Chicago is... is seeing is less restrictive budgets than in 2021 and 2022. We will continue to see conservative spending from international clients traveling to the U.S., opposed to higher budgets for domestic-based companies traveling within the U.S.

DESTINATION MUSICK CITY, A DMC NETWORK COMPANY

Nashville, TN

www.destinationmusickcity.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Valerie Summers, VP Queen of Everything

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 350

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$4 Million

Capabilities: Destination Musick City is a full-service Destination Management Company and a full service Scenic and Production Company in Nashville—as they say, if they don't already own it, they can build it. The company is celebrating its 40th year in business, with the DMC celebrating seven successful years.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: Vanderbilt University Reunion Celebration; TN Kidney Foundation Gala; Nashville Wine Auction Gala; Swan Ball; TN Heart Walk; TN Heart Foundation; Journeys Sales Meeting

Trends to Watch: Digital technology juxtaposed with retro activations

HANA APRIL INC

Minneapolis, MN

www.hanaaprilinc.com/

Top Officer Name & Title: Hana April Chughtai, Wicked Visionary

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 75

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$1.2 Million

Capabilities: Hana April Inc is a Creative Events Agency that specializes in 360 design experiences. They are a full-service agency with divisions in creative production, custom fabrication, event rentals, custom gifting, and an in-house floral studio.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: Four Day Multicultural

Wedding in Chicago, IL; Surescripts Company Wide Picnic (first of its kind with over 500 attendees); Star Tribune Best of Minnesota

Trends to Watch: Back to customized experiences, fun activations, and innovative branding at events. People are still very excited to get together and gather!



ULTIMATE VENTURES

Dallas, TX

www.uvdm.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Laurie Sprouse, CITE, CMP, DMCP

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 100–150

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$4.5 Million

Capabilities: Serving Dallas and Fort Worth, Ultimate Ventures celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2023. As the only women-owned and ADMEI-accredited DMC in

North Texas, the company uses its deep local connections to pull together unique award-winning events as well as flawless complex transportation programs for its discerning clients.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: Ultimate Ventures won

the 2022 ADMEI awards for Best Overall Program for a last-minute “Hail Mary” Annual Meeting and for Best Décor/Design for a stunning “Wildflower Welcome.”

The company also won three ILEA Texas Star Awards for Best Event Design & Décor over \$75K, Best Event Solution, and Best Meeting/Conference/Program over \$500K.

Trends to Watch: Business is back, and the Dallas-Fort Worth area is booming. As companies return to face-to-face meetings, Ultimate Ventures is seeing larger meetings, more team-building activities, and a renewed desire to create meaningful connections.

\$5 MILLION TO \$10 MILLION ANNUAL REVENUE



ADVANTAGE DESTINATION & MEETING SERVICES

Miami Beach, FL

www.advantagedms.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Jim Post, DMCP, Partner

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 300

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$9 Million

Capabilities: Approaching their 25th anniversary in business, Advantage Destination & Meeting Services serves nearly the entire state of Florida from their Miami-based headquarters. The company's markets include Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach, Boca Raton, Orlando, Tampa, Naples and Marco Island. They are a full-service DMC with a 15,000 square foot Design and Decor facility on site, with walk-in coolers and in-house design services for their clients.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: One of the single largest programs in their 25-year history was executed at the Four Seasons Hotel Palm Beach with a hotel buyout for their high-end clients. The program included a buyout of the National Croquet Facility, a Grand Yacht Charter, and three on-site, full-scale decor events including an after party in a mystical garden with live fairies and nymphs, trees, and garden swing sets.

Trends to Watch: We are approaching the summit of the events bubble where pent up demand is plateauing, and demand and turnaround times are becoming more realistic. With that, Advantage also sees purse strings tightening on upcoming budgets as the market pivots to cost savings and more prudent spending.

BIXEL & COMPANY

Los Angeles, CA
www.bixelco.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Dabney Bixel, President & CEO

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 250

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$9.5 Million

Capabilities: Bixel & Company has a reputation for producing unforgettable events coupled with unparalleled execution, in addition to exhibiting a masterful grasp of their destination's ins and outs. The L.A.-born and -bred team notes the longevity and diverse interests of its members, giving them unrivaled knowledge of the destination, ranging from iconic Los Angeles landmarks to the hippest new restaurants and nightspots, as well as access to many exclusive venues and private clubs. From Fortune 500 companies to boutique independent firms, the company's diverse clientele entrusts them with their most critical event, destination, incentive and meeting needs.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: 2022 was both an uplifting and innovative year for the Bixel team. A top highlight included producing the high-profile Summit of the Americas events for the U.S. government, which was an honor for the team. It was a huge hit with the clients, and they felt it was an amazing accomplishment on Bixel's production side.

Bixel & Company also hosted and produced a wonderful event for a nonprofit organization that provides summer camp and mentorship programs for foster children in the Los Angeles area.

Trends to Watch: The focus on team building programs has been stronger than ever in 2022. This appears to be due to the separation so many colleagues and corporate teams experienced during the pandemic, and this trend is continuing steadily into 2023. Clients are still leaning toward utilizing outdoor venues for functions not only for COVID purposes, but also because LA's gorgeous weather allows for outdoor venues practically year-round!



THE CE GROUP, INC.

San Antonio, TX

www.cegroupinc.net/

Top Officer Name & Title: Janet Holliday, DMCP, President & CEO

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 30-40

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$5 Million

Capabilities: The CE Group, Inc. creates custom experiences by understanding the needs and requests of their clients and working them seamlessly into a customized program. As the only accredited DMC in San Antonio, they infuse the senses of San Antonio into each of their innovative experiences.

The company makes it their priority that the client is stress-free during the planning and execution of the program by building a relationship based on trust. The markets The CE Group, Inc. serves include convention groups, associations, corporate groups, and incentive groups.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: For their event Routes

Americas, the team brought hundreds of senior professionals from leading airlines, airports, and other aviation stakeholders to San Antonio. Their visit included multiple days of a VIP Program, pre-conference tours, airport transfers and a curated networking event to include overall event planning and production support.

Their event, Belfor, took shape as a "Heart of a Hero" Epic Block Party. This was a tribute to local everyday heroes: firefighters, police, EMS, etc.

18TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT

The block party embodied nostalgia and patriotism displayed as a parade, picnic, tailgate, and concert under the stars.

Other landmark events included hosting a conference for 7x24 Exchange entitled “Building for the Future” highlighted Fiesta, Texas, and the future; as well as a multi-day forum for Air Conditioning Heating and Refrigeration Institute (AHRI).

Trends to Watch: Teambuilding, attendee selected gifts, inclusion of spouse/family, interactive experiences, more focus on the destination.



DECO PRODUCTIONS

Miami, FL

www.decoproductions.com/

Top Officer Name & Title: Nicholas Zazzera, President

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 85

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$7.2 Million

Capabilities: DECO Productions has served the South Florida community in special event productions and destination management for over 30 years. Hailed as the “go-to” company for creativity, customer service, value, and dependability, their clients rely on them to produce impeccable events. Housed in its 20,000 square foot facility are artisans, designers, carpenters, seamstresses, and production personnel who create the magic that is the “DECO” experience.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: 2022 was a big year for Deco Productions. The company

started the year with its involvement in the annual South Beach Wine and Food Festival, designing custom booths for wine and spirits exhibitors. Then, they were a part of the annual Morikami Gala where they played off the theme of “Year of the Tiger” with unique decor and entertainment. They also had a blast at Joia Beach where they threw a networking event for Checkout.com, who was heavily involved in Miami’s Bitcoin Conference. Finally, they produced an entire conference for a cyber security company called Acronis planning their meetings, receptions, and exhibits for over 1,000 attendees.

Trends to Watch: 2023 is looking very promising already. We are going to see a high volume of both corporate and social events. It looks like decor trends will include minimalistic looks, lots of colors, custom builds, elevated ceiling decor, and increased use of lighting. For entertainment, Deco Productions is seeing more live bands and musicians, unique themed acts, and increased use of technology for guests. When it comes to corporate events and clients coming to their locations, they are looking for expertise and a high level of service to ensure the group has a successful experience.

DESTINATION SOUTH MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Atlanta, GA

www.destinationouth.com/

Top Officer Name & Title: Cynthia Alford, Owner

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 250

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$12.5 Million

Capabilities: Destination South Meetings and Events is a fully accredited powerhouse of

destination management, event production, event marketing, and meeting management in the virtual, hybrid, and in-person environments. Established in 1995 by President & Managing Director, Cynthia Alford, DMCP, the company’s goal is to provide innovative and transformative event experiences for their clients worldwide. They have offices in both Atlanta, Georgia and Charleston, South Carolina.

The professionals at Destination South have numerous years of experience in the corporate, association, and non-profit markets on events large and small—ranging from 50 to 40,000 attendees—as well as incentive programs in the Southeast and across the country.

Noteworthy Programs/Events

in 2022: In 2022, across both locations, Destination South experienced what they call a “tsunami of opportunities.” They were fortunate to turn these into many incredible experiences for clients and attendees, including a last-minute holiday party for 4,000 attendees for one of the world’s top three most recognizable brands, and a multi-day event featuring the best and brightest of Atlanta’s art scene inspired design, music, and entertainment that proved without a doubt that beautifully designed and themed events are truly back! With 27 years of relationship and brand building, plus an amazing team as the ingredients that allowed for designing and producing so many amazing programs in 2022, they worked often with extremely compressed timelines due to uncertainty, as well as availability of dates, venues, and resources. As everyone returned to full speed, the goal was to be a trusted and reliable partner to their clients in this watershed year.

Trends to Watch: Short lead times and compressed timelines seem here to stay. Networking is back—and attendees crave time to network both in structured AND unstructured environments. Attendees want enough free time to enjoy the destination. Destination South suggests not packing the agenda so tightly that there's no time to explore the area, as well as giving back through activations and local event experiences. Providing charitable/ philanthropic opportunities is in; also, wellness-focused events continue to intrigue planners and excite attendees.



IVI DMC ENTERPRISES

Cancun, Mexico

www.ividmc.travel/

Top Officer Name & Title: Jose-Manuel Garcia, Visionary, Founder & Seller of Dreams

Average Number of Programs/ Events Per Year: 150

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$5 Million

Capabilities: Since 1986, IVI DMC Enterprises has provided full

destination services for incentives, meetings, and ad-hoc events at more than 21 destinations in four Latin American countries (Mexico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica). The company has their own Quality System based on the ISO 9001 standards, full-coverage liability insurance, safety and security programs, plus they support the local communities through its Foundation Amigos of the Planet.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: Together alongside one of their clients, the Mexican Caribbean office organized a showcase event for almost 800 attendees, working with various suppliers that put



MEXICO · CUBA · DOMINICAN REPUBLIC · COSTA RICA

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SERVICES:

Programs Design · Meet & Greet · Transportation · Team building · Venues · Hospitality Desk
· CSR Events · Dinner Programs · Activities & Excursions

18TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT

their trust in the IVI team to help organize different activities and local experiences for their booth activations. A few activities that the team organized for the showcase included a hammock workshop, Mexican fair games, a cartoonist, a photo booth, henna tattoos, masseurs, Mayan characters, a Mexican candy station, and a piñata-making workshop—this last one being the most successful.

The company also planned a high-end event for a VIP group that wanted to have a nice private party in Tulum. The team managed to rent a luxurious beachside villa and organized a delicious barbecue with a private chef, premium open bar, and DJ in the best possible scenario—the breathtaking Caribbean Sea. The event was a resounding success.

Trends to Watch: Clients today are looking for more team-building events with a corporate social responsibility component, to give back while they work together towards a common goal. Another big trend is to integrate authentic experiences in which the participants can learn about the culture of the destination. IVI is also seeing a more specific focus on wellness activities that also include being in contact with nature.

**\$10 MILLION TO \$20
MILLION ANNUAL REVENUE**

METROCONNECTIONS

Minneapolis, MN

www.metroconnections.com

Top Officer Name & Title: David Graves, President & CEO

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 700

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$20 Million

Capabilities: metroConnections services the corporate and association market. They extend far beyond traditional DMC offerings with services that include strategic planning, creative services such as video editing, stage production, hybrid and virtual events. They offer full event management with a focus on special events, décor, online registration, meeting management as well as transportation services.

Noteworthy Programs/Events

in 2022: In 2022, the company executed numerous in-person, hybrid, and virtual events for companies that include Pentair, Dominion, Patron, Sun Country Airlines, Cargill, Ecolab, Apple, QVC, Winnebago and many others.

Trends to Watch: Companies will continue to look for fresh ideas that contribute to the brand and messaging while incorporating engagement and employee/customer feedback within each event. Hybrid and virtual will continue to play a role in 2023 where organizations need to be cost conscious while still getting their messaging out to their audiences. Leadership development will continue to be a major theme of many event programs.



PreferredDMCs
THE DESTINATION PARTNERS

PREFERRED DMCs

Barcelona, Spain

www.preferred-dmcs.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Marc Schwabach, DMCP

Average Number of Programs/

Events Per Year: 500

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$10-15 Million

Capabilities: Preferred DMCs is a boutique consortium of select, independent, and highly qualified European DMCs providing global sales and marketing support to its members. Members are recruited by invitation-only and must have ADMEI membership, be well-established, and have strong reputations, and hold certification or accreditation.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in

2022: High-end incentive travel programs, car launches, and top-notch corporate events throughout all of Europe, particularly in Greece, France, Spain and Portugal, Malta, Scandinavia, Ireland, and Poland.

Trends to Watch: Preferred DMCs sees increased budgets for incentive travel programs for less invitees that are very well-selected. Clients are better informed, and their expectations are higher than ever—and so are the requirements for DMCs as pivotal suppliers.



SOUTHWEST CONFERENCE PLANNERS

Scottsdale, AZ

[www.](http://www.southwestconferenceplanners.com/)

southwestconferenceplanners.com/

Top Officer Name & Title: Jim Lammy, Owner

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 700+

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$16 Million

Capabilities: Southwest Conference Planners has been planning

events for clients all over the state of Arizona since 1986 and are celebrating their 37th year in business this year. “SWCP” has become a well-known nickname in the industry among their trusted vendors, valued partners, and exceptional clients. SWCP takes great pride when it comes to creating a perfect Arizona experience. The services typically include but are not limited to the following: tours and activities, entertainment, event design, teambuilding, transportation, staffing, restaurant management, off property events, photography, videography, and really any service in Arizona.

Noteworthy Programs/Events

in 2022: In 2022, Southwest Conference Planners was extremely fortunate to welcome over 700 programs to Arizona. Some of the most noteworthy include: a curated specialty, local, farmers market for one of our repeats and brought it right to the attendees on property at the Phoenician Resort in October.

Another event was the “Art of Food” experience, where attendees experienced a different art-focused activation in each dining room location of the mansion. As guests made their way through the Wrigley Mansion in Phoenix, each room focused on an art activation including an art board charcuterie board, real living art, easel food signs, and more.

SWCP also created a full ‘80s themed conference to celebrate a client’s 30th anniversary. SWCP had to create three different ‘80s themed nights that were completely unique.

Trends to Watch: SWCP has seen a big shift towards engagement. Spontaneous elements like creating entertainment that continually changes throughout the event keeps attendees waiting for the next big item or reveal. SWCP predicts that

people are going to focus more on what attendees can be doing and learning during events rather than what the event space itself looks like. By offering engaging elements to the event along with a beautiful event space, the goal is that people will have conversations about what they did while in the event space.

\$20 TO \$100 MILLION IN ANNUAL REVENUE



CSI DMC

Washington, DC

www.csi-dmc.com

Top Officer Name & Title: David Hainline, CEO

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 1000

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$86 Million

Capabilities: CSI DMC is the destination and event management company clients trust to design and deliver exceptional experiences. Established in 1987, CSI is a privately owned company powered by an experienced, passionate team with deep destination knowledge and unparalleled creativity. Their core capabilities include elevated special events, innovative entertainment, décor and activations, customized tours, team building, and dine-arounds, top-quality meeting and hospitality staffing, and superior transportation and shuttle management. CSI DMC has 12 regional offices across the US and globally with CSI International.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in

2022: 2022 was a very productive year for CSI DMC. The company’s creative team developed 529 new event concepts. On a larger scale, in Nashville, TN, the CSI DMC team delivered a stellar first-time street party celebration for 8,000 people involving over 68 vendors, 42 shops, entertainment, supporting acts, and 15,000 meals served.

For other events, it took four date changes for 1,300 eager global attendees to descend on Orlando for their company rebrand and celebration—and celebrate they did! In Boston, the innovative crew delivered multiple inspiring experiences for 300 people on a week-long incentive trip. The savvy CSI DMC team in Washington, DC, produced a coveted, high-level event for 200 VIPs on the National Mall while simultaneously planning an event at the Library of Congress. In San Diego, CA, the company’s local experts were honored to arrange a first-ever corporate gathering and dinner amongst the jets at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar. And 2023 is big! The team is already flexing their destination knowledge, relationships, creativity, and logistical expertise to help clients elevate their events into exceptional experiences well into the year.

Trends to Watch: Health and wellness programs step into the spotlight, and CSI DMC loves that mocktails are hitting a high note! Work/life integration is significant as personalized experiences and community connection continues to buzz. Sustainability is not a trend; carbon offsets, responsible choices, and waste reduction initiatives are now bottom-line objectives for many organizations.

18TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT



DestinationConceptsinc

A GLOBAL DMC PARTNER

DESTINATION CONCEPTS INC.

San Diego, CA

www.destinationconcepts.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Brynne Frost, CEO

Average Number of Programs/ Events Per Year: 250

Programs/1,800 Events

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$40-50 Million

Capabilities: DCi is celebrating their 25th year in 2023! With an in-house team of designers, entertainment managers, creative services professionals, production, and exclusive Design Studio at their disposal, DCi delivers consistent creative and logistical excellence in all markets. The company supports programs of all sizes and scope utilizing both their large full-time team and an expansive roster of strategically placed part-time team members across destinations. Core values drive their success, and by being adaptable, flexible, and innovative they are a chameleon for their clients. DCi is positioned exceptionally well to surpass all records moving into 2023 and have fun doing it. Another core component of the company is supplier diversity. As a successful certified women-owned business by WBENC, they strive to consistently pay it forward by increasing their spend with diverse suppliers year after year.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: The company supported an automotive client in their efforts to get to Net Zero by providing

sustainable solutions throughout a five-day conference in Austin, TX. In addition to a stunning galaxy inspired design for the awards and spot-on logistics for an offsite street party, the team provided sustainable signage, repurposed décor elements, living centerpieces, and a comprehensive anti-waste strategy at all events.

Another standout experience brought 1,600 global tech company team members to San Diego for their annual conference. The creative team gave San Diego's iconic Gaslamp Quarter a sugary sweet Adult Playground-themed makeover with larger-than-life elements like giant slides, ball pits, a massive balloon art installation, thematic large-scale branding, and custom swing sets, to create an engaging atmosphere.

DCi's skillset shined during a 1,500-person conference in San Francisco, CA that spread out across four different hotel properties. They designed each onsite event to complement the various spaces while providing the same look and feel across all hotels, and these elements made the events look seamless when all connected virtually for a session with the CEO on the final night.

Another multi-faceted feat included a four-day summit held simultaneously in Orange County, CA, San Diego, CA, and Phoenix, AZ. Even with three different group sizes, spaces, and destinations, DCi delivered a uniform experience at each property for all attendees.

The team also travelled to Montana, where they supported a series of media events for a 2023 vehicle launch. DCi designed and produced brand-forward settings within a private airplane hangar with sweeping mountain views and daytime events at the rustic ranch used in the hit show 1883.

Trends to Watch: DCi thinks attendees are ready to celebrate even bigger in 2023 and looking for

a true escape. Clients are looking for more immersive environments for their programs. Anything thematic that takes guests on a dynamic journey is at the top of the must-have list. Their in-house designers are reimagining popular themes such as Alice in Wonderland or Top Gun, with modern styling, entertainment, and tech innovations. The '90s are taking over the decades themed event scene with over-the-top grunge, pop star, and hip-hop inspired moments. Cookie-cutter doesn't cut it and it's not what attendees want. Their designers are also seeing a trend towards neutral color palettes, so they worked with their exclusive Design Studio to double rental inventory of versatile neutral items that fit a range of events from boho chic to a beach event. Sustainability is also at the top of the list as it should be! DCi has successfully implemented solar powered event elements and waste reduction plans to support their client's eco-minded initiatives which are directly aligned with their own. They are working diligently to make sustainability move out of the "trend" zone for future events.



IMPRINT GROUP
Colorado • Florida • Las Vegas



IMPRINT EVENTS GROUP

Denver, CO

www.imprintgroup.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Nicole Marsh, Partner | Chris Starkey, Partner | Adriane Hodder, Partner

Average Number of Programs/ Events Per Year: 550

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$34 Million

Capabilities: Founded in 1969, Imprint Events Group has strategic locations across the U.S. including Colorado, Nevada, and Florida as well as a team that manages their

National Accounts that the company executes events for throughout the country and internationally. The company is celebrating over 50 years in business and a tenured team boasting over 700 years combined event industry experience. With their expert knowledge, creativity, and passion, Imprint thoughtfully curates event experiences that are well beyond their client's expectations.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: 2022 was one for the record books for Imprint. In addition to breaking a Guinness World Record for a client's CSR initiative, the company had two record-breaking programs in size and scope as well as three record-breaking months. They've also grown their team to be the largest and most experienced in company history. Viewing the logistics of events as a given, they have built a team of top-tier experts who go above and beyond to curate innovative, tech-savvy, and transformative experiences. 2022 was also a year to deepen relationships with clients—and have fun along the way.

Trends to Watch: Clients will continue to look for strategic event partners that they can trust to help them achieve their event goals through deeper relationships and not just one-time transactions. More so than ever, clients need to demonstrate ROI for their events and meetings as costs continue to rise. Imprint is focused on helping their clients think deeper about their unique impact and the myriad of ways they can create a lasting mark on their most important audiences through live events.

LIBERTY INTERNATIONAL TOURISM GROUP

Salzburg, Austria
www.liberty-int.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Mario Enzesberger, President & CEO

**Average Number of Programs/
Events Per Year:** 3000

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$70 Million

Capabilities: Liberty Tourism is the largest privately-owned Global Destination Management Company. With offices operating in 90+ countries worldwide and a team of nearly 400 multilingual, passionate professionals globally situated, they have been serving corporations and agencies for over 31+ years.

Specialized segments include MICE, Premium Leisure, Sport Team Hospitality, Cruise and Train Ground Handling, Aircraft Charter Services, and Virtual & Hybrid Solutions. Added values are their strong financial stability, global insurance coverage, multinational synergies, global procurement, and partnerships programs and local sales network. With their vast internal communications system, clients receive the attention their specific travel needs require and the peace of mind of knowing they are in safe hands all around the globe.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: 800pax German insurance incentive to Austria; 500pax Austrian Association Congress to Vienna, Austria; 1600pax UK Corporate event to Berlin, Germany; 550pax Brazilian Corporate incentive to Munich, Germany; 220pax French Luxury brand seminar to Amsterdam, NL; 2000pax National Sales Meeting to Athens, Greece; 2200pax UK Car Launch to Mallorca, Spain; 1200pax U.S. Corporate to Spain; 400pax UK Corporate to Lisbon, Portugal; 600pax Press Car Launch to Stockholm, Sweden; 430pax Mexico Insurance Incentive to Cartagena, Colombia; 150pax Israel luxury incentive to Dubai, UAE; various delegations to Cop27 to Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt; and various football teams and delegations to European cups during the 2022 football season.

Trends to Watch: Despite hybrid being here to stay at congresses and in management meetings, in-person events are back at full speed. The trend for in-person events is, however, getting more challenging due to prices rising and international uncertainty. The consequence has been shorter lead time to book events and smaller events to keep the budget this year. But high-end, larger incentives are planned for 2023 onward as companies recognize the benefits of MICE travel for their business. CSR remains a hot topic difficult to implement as clients do not want to invest more in CSR programs.



RMC - RESORTS/ MOUNTAINS/CITIES

Basalt, CO
www.rmcdmc.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Shawn Thomson, Owner & CEO

**Average Number of Programs/
Events Per Year:** 500

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$48 Million

Capabilities: RMC is a woman-owned and founder-led company which specializes in full-service, high-end, luxury destination management services in the U.S. From the peaks of Aspen to the infamous vineyards of Napa, to the low tides and beaches of The Lowcountry, RMC has masterfully crafted thousands of unforgettable experiences for decades. RMC proudly works with a distinguished clientele of corporate and incentive groups and travel and meeting planners to produce completely tailored destination services. With 30+ destinations, RMC

18TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT

continues to evolve their portfolio of premier locations across the U.S. from the snowcapped Rocky Mountains and Grand Tetons to the sands of Santa Barbara to the rolling hills of wine country. Their local teams source, plan, and execute the very best events for their clients.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in

2022: Toyota Board of Governors; Morgan Stanley; Aspen JAS Festival; Luxury Ski Week; Biohaven; Centura Health; Martiz

Trends to Watch: After seeing the exponential growth since the middle of 2021, RMC believes that in-person events will not only continue to rise, but also continue to be restructured and reorganized considering the attendee's time, attention, and safety. More streamlined scheduling and

adding quality experiences over content is becoming increasingly important for meetings and events. Connection is powerful and RMC believes that it's a priority.



TERRAEVENTS

Milan, Italy

www.terraevents.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Lorenzo Pignatti, Founder & President

Average Number of Programs/ Events Per Year: 250

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$20 Million

Capabilities: Founded in 2010 as Plus 39 ITALY, and rebranded in 2018, TERRAEVENTS operates with staffed offices in 4 key destinations: Italy, Spain, Portugal and France, plus the dedicated team of TERRAEVENTS Sport. Their client portfolio includes major multinational corporates and third parties in Canada, Brazil, Australia, United Kingdom, Germany, Singapore, and South Africa. All TERRAEVENTS offices under direct ownership, managed by their local teams of DMC professionals imbued with professional knowledge, practical expertise, and experience



TERRAMAR, A DMC NETWORK COMPANY
Delivering unparalleled service



CANCÚN
RIVIERA MAYA



LAKE TAHOE
RENO



LOS CABOS



PUERTO VALLARTA
RIVIERA NAYARIT



SAN DIEGO
ORANGE COUNTY
PALM SPRINGS



SAN FRANCISCO
NAPA/SONOMA
SACRAMENTO



PANAMÁ



TERRAMAR, A DMC NETWORK COMPANY
USA | MEXICO | PANAMÁ *Locally operated, worldwide.*

#TerraMarDMC
terraмарdestinations.com



gained over many years in their destinations. As a full-service DMC, TERRAEVENTS works with clients to design and develop creative and cost-effective solutions unique to their events in each of their destinations.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: 1,200-person convention operated in Milan and Lake Como for a leading global provider of financial and auditing services; 700-person event organized in Lisbon, Portugal, for another of the big Four accounting organizations; 300-person event operated in Madrid for U.S. public policy and think tank organization with a private dinner in the city's former bullring; 200-person convention operated in Paris, for a world leader in computer peripherals and software; 80-person luxury incentive program operated in Taormina, Sicily, Italy for major U.S. insurance company with a private concert held in the ancient Greek theater.

Trends to Watch: The company's destination teams are exploring new destinations, hotel properties, and venues to create unique, experiential, and eco-sustainable programs for events which are customized and connective.



TERRAMAR, A DMC NETWORK COMPANY

Los Cabos, Mexico

www.terramardestinations.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Sunny Irvine, Owner

Average Number of Programs/ Events Per Year: 550

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$23 Million

Capabilities: Terramar, a DMC Network Company, was perhaps one of the very few organizations that grew during the pandemic years. Now with offices in Los Cabos, Panama, Cancun and the Riviera Maya, Puerto Vallarta and Riviera Nayarit, San Francisco and the Bay Area, Lake Tahoe, Reno, and San Diego, the company is celebrating almost 30 years of success.

Terramar provides a consistently high level of service in the following fields: domestic and international meetings; management for special events; venues and logistics; dine-arounds and fabulous group dinners; registration websites including airport transfers, dine-arounds, and activities; hospitality desk services; program design; assistance with hotel and air reservations; airport transfers; ground transportation; tours and activities; room gifts; and marketing and media center services; vendor management.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: Terramar has been part of many amazing events in 2022, the NBC American Century Celebrity Golf event and Dreamforce being two of the most recognizable programs. The company worked with their hotel partners in San Diego (The Hotel Del Coronado) and in Lake Tahoe (Edgewood Tahoe Resort) to assist in their unveiling of much anticipated new expansions and remodels this year.

Trends to Watch: Terramar is working to be more creative and efficient due to limited vendor resources and suppliers. Staffing has returned to pre-pandemic numbers across all their offices, but many of the vendors they rely on are still struggling to staff. Terramar has adjusted to support those deficiencies with their own staff to ensure that clients are still receiving the same level of service.

They account for additional staffing needs at the hotels to support events as needed. The company is working closer with all hotel partners and CVBs than ever before. There is a need to be creative with space and timing to accommodate the volume of group events wanting to book in their destinations, and clients have found that the DMC can support them to find ways to "make it work."



360 DESTINATION GROUP

Irvine, CA

www.360dg.com/

Top Officer Name & Title: Shelly Archer, Managing Partner & Trevor Hanks, DMCP, Managing Partner

Average Number of Programs/ Events Per Year: 700

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$70 Million

Capabilities: For over 40 years, 360 Destination Group has delivered unforgettable events for their clients. The rockstar team is ready to assist with: event design and development, digital event services, unique décor and theme concepts, team building and CSR programs, off-property venue selection, entertainment, professional event staffing, transportation and shuttle services, dine-arounds, registration and hospitality room solutions, and activities and tours. The team of 130+ just keeps getting better and continues to grow. 360DG is honored to work hard and play hard in major destinations throughout the U.S. and beyond and across international destinations.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: Old Hollywood Sophistication Meets New Hollywood Glamour: When their client asked for a program that screamed, "OMG, we're in Hollywood!," 360DG knew exactly what to deliver. This 450-person, multi-day event in Los

18TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT

Angeles included seamless airport arrivals and departures, a relaxing, beachy Welcome Reception overlooking the ocean, complete with everyone's favorite west coast burgers from an In-N-Out food truck, a 'film noir' themed Speakeasy Dinner Event at Paramount Picture Studios, a red-carpet Awards Gala and After Party that would make Oscar jealous at the legendary Dolby Theater, and unforgettable activities featuring the very best that Southern California has to offer.

Trends to Watch: We have all experienced our fair share of virtual interactions since 2020. 2023 is the year of connecting in extraordinary ways. That means thinking outside of the box when it comes to planning. How? By adding interactive

experiential elements into ordinary meetings and events. There are so many moments that can be taken up a notch with experiential adjustments. Make arrivals and departures more exciting by including customized greetings for each guest. Don't just host a dinner event; instead, create an environment and menu that utilizes all five senses throughout the evening. When enhancing a typical program, the sky's the limit! Another trend those at 360DG are seeing emerge is the inclusion of wellness and mindfulness into corporate meetings and events. Group yoga classes, meditation rooms, guided breathing sessions—these are all perfect ways to show attendees that their wellbeing and health is just as important as the success of the program.

**OVER \$100 MILLION IN
ANNUAL REVENUE**

Access

ACCESS

San Diego, CA

www.accessdmc.com/

Top Officer Name & Title: Danielle Phippen, Chief Creative Officer

**Average Number of Programs/
Events Per Year:** 1,200-1,500

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$122 Million

Capabilities: Founded in 1969, ACCESS offers a wide range of services, from creative event



Shared
Experiences.
Inspired
People.

accessdmc.com



design and comprehensive program planning to transportation logistics, activities, and more. ACCESS doesn't just focus on what an event should be, but why an event should be at all. They collaborate with clients from coast to coast to transform events into shared experiences—because shared experiences create the opportunity to both inspire and be inspired, and inspired people drive organizational change.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: 2022 was a record-breaking year drenched in memorable moments and shared experiences. Large scale celebrations seemed to be the trend. A few favorites: a block party with logistical challenges was executed by the team on famed Rainey Street in Austin. Eleven unique bungalow style bars, restaurants (and even a parking lot) hosted over 2,100 guests for an evening celebration.

Marco Island was home to a multi-day incentive program offering guests an unexpected Floridian experience, highlighting the three main industries of the Sunshine State to include Sugar, Citrus, and Flowers.

Finally, a Vail Summer Cabin event captivated guests from their arrival with giant naked teepees set across the meadows, velvet lounge furniture, and string market lighting throughout. The evening started with a five-star dinner inside the cabin with an electric strings performance to set the tone, followed by an outdoor concert under the stars.

Trends to Watch: Access continues to see their clients in need of a collaborative and consultative approach to events. It is more crucial now than ever to understand the “why” so that the company can deliver the “what” both impactfully and seamlessly. A layered team approach allows both local and national internal teams and

vendor partners to come together to provide unparalleled events. Sustainability and cause-based events have re-emerged with a focus on aligning the culture and goals of the organization into the event. Immersive experiences remain paramount with a focus on food and beverage. “Playing with your food” has become cool again and offering engaging activations that include both fun and sustenance are a must!



HELLO! DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Orlando, FL

www.hello-dmc.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Paul Mears III, President and CEO

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 3,500

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$140 Million

Capabilities: From coast to coast and beach to ballroom, Hello! Destination Management has grown from one office in 1986 to 13 offices servicing dozens of the top meeting destinations in the country, including Arizona, Northern and Southern California, Chicago, Colorado, Central and South Florida, Las Vegas, Nashville, New York, Central and North Texas and Washington, D.C. From the first Hello to the final exclamation, their services enhance all guest touchpoints during a program, including transportation and event staffing, tours and teambuilding, dining and off-property events, and full-scale entertainment production, storytelling and event design.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: 2022 saw the return of multiple large programs that had been postponed during the

pandemic, including a multi-day space-themed conference that was set to operate in March 2020 just days after lockdown began that they “relaunched” with updated theming. This year they also produced multiple large programs in their newest destinations, New York, Colorado, and Chicago, as well as a large-scale programs in multiple destinations that featured name act entertainment, drone and fireworks shows, and full production.

Trends to Watch: 2023 is shaping up to be a busy year for the events industry. As companies continue to utilize hybrid working environments, in-person events are seeing a renewed relevancy as opportunities to cultivate culture. Whereas in previous years when the primary purpose of in-person events was to facilitate face to face meeting, companies are now looking to events to help reinforce and foster messaging and branding to their internal teams and external clients to supplement the lack of in-person day-to-day work in offices. Innovations in technology and unique food service styles that were utilized for logistical purposes during the pandemic are now finding their place as tools to help further customize the guest experience as they interact with the physical world of an event. As our collective attention spans narrow, events are a key driver of tactile, personal experiences that help attendees live in the moment and off-screen. Notable trends include an increase desire for guest personalization, bespoke and authentic touches, and a focus on story narrative to connect guest touchpoints.

OVATION GLOBAL DMC

Geneva, Switzerland

www.ovationdmc.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Sebastien Tondeur, CEO

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 4,000

18TH ANNUAL DMC SPOTLIGHT

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$300 Million

Capabilities: With almost 30 years of experience, Ovation counts its worldwide reach and standard operating procedures as two of its noteworthy capabilities. The company has offices in more than 100 destinations across five continents; operations comprise 26 wholly owned offices and approx. 62 strategic DMC partners. They are the only global DMC with so many wholly owned offices. The company serves a broad clientele, from the “biggest brands” in banking, consultancy, automotive, IT, and pharmaceuticals to direct selling. An online learning platform to constantly train and develop the

team’s talents has been in place for nearly a decade.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: Ovation Spain DMC is the official DMC partner for the IBTM World and has supported the annual tradeshow in Barcelona again with many hostesses, off site events, and hundreds of transfers. Ovation Global DMC operated seven major Direct Selling Incentive/recognition programs of 1,000-3,000 attendees. What’s more, the annual Mobile World Congress was a big hit again in 2022. Major exhibitor events, production, and ground services were constant.

Trends to Watch: Reduced RFP Lead Times: In early 2022, Ovation saw an increase in last minute requests

and shorter than normal lead times for most programs. The average lead time in 2019 was 6.2 days, whereas the average lead time in 2022 was 3.6 days.

Rise of Small-Scale Events: Ongoing restrictions during the first several months of 2022 meant companies were globally weary of organizing large scale events. In fact, in 2022 the company saw most incentives were for groups of less than 100 people. Despite this recent trend, they expect to see larger groups in the coming year.

Importance of Sustainability: In the past year, destinations focused on sustainable tourism and programs that actively promoted local culture and preserved natural surroundings.

LOCAL EXPERTISE
NATIONAL REACH
WE ARE HELLO!

We’re honored to be recognized as a Top DMC by Special Events Magazine for the 18th year, and our team is ready to show you why. We’re here to let you (and your guests) enjoy the experience. So give us a call, and let’s say Hello!

Hello! DESTINATION
MANAGEMENT

ARIZONA | CALIFORNIA | CHICAGO | COLORADO | FLORIDA
LAS VEGAS | NASHVILLE | NEW YORK | TEXAS | WASHINGTON, D.C.

hello-dmc.com



Planners are seeking out ways to make events more sustainable; from eco-friendly venues to waste-free catering. Rising concern for environmental and social challenges indicates that sustainability will continue to be a focus for the industry in 2023.

High Demand Vs Staff Shortages: The lingering effects of the last two years became apparent in 2022 regarding the workforce. DMCs in general were faced with a drastic increase in incoming requests but with reduced teams. This led to delays in responses from DMCs. The current sellers' market obliges the supplier network to make priorities and smaller events are being turned down.

Looking ahead: Demand is still up, and the number of RFPs is still high. In the short and mid-term, the influx is expected to stay high, but Ovation is noticing numbers plateauing. The demand will decrease, and the staffing will further increase. We will see the sellers versus buyers' market balancing back again.



PRA, INC.

Chicago, IL
www.pra.com

Top Officer Name & Title: Mike Fiber, Chief Executive Officer

Average Number of Programs/Events Per Year: 2,000

Estimated 2022 Revenue: \$170 Million

Capabilities: For over 40 years, PRA has delivered experiences throughout the U.S. in destinations, on stage and on screen. With its

unique service capabilities, PRA event architects guide organization in bringing people together with highly produced, strategic program design, brand engagements and authentic destination experiences. Utilizing a holistic approach to event design, PRA helps clients create a legacy that leaves a lasting impact to achieve goals. PRA offers a wide array of business event management capabilities, including destination programs, creative design services, event production and technology, as well as team building and CSR programs, activities, tours and excursions, and transportation logistics.

Noteworthy Programs/Events in 2022: PRA delivered amazing event experiences, each of which amplified the impact of the event on the clients' overall meeting objectives. The company worked with a leading global consulting firm to produce its first family-friendly, in-person meeting since 2020, bringing team members together in a unique island venue setting for its staff retreat. The PRA team transformed the outdoor venue, accessible only through ferry transportation, into a family-friendly camp with activities that were engaging for all ages.

Another standout was an exclusive incentive program in their mountain region of Aspen that was designed to make guests feel right at home. The PRA team designed an Aspen-themed Food and Wine Festival, a gala night at Dunbar Ranch (Kevin Costner's private estate), curated exclusive activities, spectacular off-site events, dine-arounds and VIP group dining. The client awarded PRA the program based on the team's creativity and ability to create a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Trends to Watch: The attendee experience is more important than ever as we redefine what creative

means to events, and the approach we take, to create engaging holistic guest experiences that connect us, on all levels. Business events now stretch beyond physical environments, resulting in a wider, larger audience we need to consider when creating an environment for deep connections. Events must be designed first by looking through the lens of the attendees—factoring in needs, how the audience will think and feel, and what they will do when they experience. This requires design competencies and alignment with suppliers able to adapt to the attendee-centric model.

In addition, the social impact of events will be a major focus. The industry will continue to see localized events, with corporate social responsibility being more prevalent than ever before, as companies will be drawn to supporting local communities with locally sourced goods and services. It's a key area of focus for PRA and one the company is putting a lot of energy and resources towards. There is also a pull towards nostalgic attendee activations geared towards comforting foods, activities and items from years past. From emerging technology solutions to personalized approaches for attendees, ever-present sustainability best practices and more, PRA continues to shape and evolve business events, focusing the passionate minds and hearts of our team members on finding solutions that help move our industry forward. ●

Note: All information here is supplied by the companies listed and was current at press time. Want to be on this list next year? Complete our survey at <https://form.jotform.com/223485274835060>.

Finding Your Focus at a Conference



If you play your cards right, you can maximize access to top-quality education and networking opportunities to produce a meaningful return on your investment.

By Christie Osborne

Arriving at a conference can feel like a whirlwind. With a jam-packed schedule and plenty of people to meet, it's easy to stray away from your big-picture purpose: education. And there's really no better place than a series of conference breakout sessions to get exposed to innovative ideas and discover emerging trends in modern best practices.

While it's fun to see old friends, learn new skills, and be inspired by the latest trends, an unfocused approach can lead to information overload and social exhaustion by the end of the first day. Clearly, that's not the best way to get the most out of the time and money spent attending a conference.

Large conferences like [Catersource](#) + [The Special Event](#) have so much to offer, as long as you have the capacity to absorb the information presented. But to do so, you first must strategize your approach.

If you play your cards right, you can maximize access to top-quality education and networking opportunities to produce a meaningful return on your investment.

As a speaker, I sometimes attend a dozen or more conferences each year. Here's the system that helps me get the most out of the educational and networking opportunities at large national conferences.

Identify your "One Thing"

There's a good chance this year isn't your first time attending Catersource + The Special Event—and there's an even better chance it won't be your last. There are

plenty of conferences in your future, so there's no need to stretch yourself thin.

Instead of starting with the conference schedule, start with your business goals. Identify the one thing you can do in your business this year (or quarter) that will make everything else easier or irrelevant. Those familiar with Gary Keller and Jay Papasan's work will recognize this framework from their aptly-titled book, *The One Thing*.

The crux of this philosophy specifies that your "one thing" must meet one of two criteria:

- It must make everything else easier, or
- It must make everything else irrelevant.

Your "one thing" could influence your entire business or one important aspect, like staffing, marketing, or purchasing. For example, say you want to increase your net income by 30%. You could come up with plenty of ways to reach that goal, but if you discover that reducing staff churn and food waste goes further than increasing your marketing efforts, you will see more results by focusing your attention on the former and attending sessions that support employee relationships and operations that reduce waste.

When you're clear on the "one thing" that will transform your business, you'll be able to plan your conference experience with purpose and direct your attention to the education and networking opportunities that matter most.

Decide on an educational approach

Depending on your skill level, industry experience, and the complexity of your "one thing," you'll need to choose an

Instead of starting with the conference schedule, start with your business goals. Identify the one thing you can do in your business this year (or quarter) that will make everything else easier or irrelevant.

educational approach that fits your conference goals. Let's treat it as if you were selecting college courses. You can pick one of two paths:

1. The General Education

Approach: From history to physics to Congolese drumming, general education is all about sampling a diverse range of subjects. While you shouldn't expect to advance past introductory-level content, you'll walk away as a jack of all trades with enough knowledge to navigate many areas of business.

- This approach is ideal if you need to manage projects with many moving parts or supervise many technical contractors.

2. The College Major Track:

Declaring a major is like telling the world where you want to focus your energy. Specializing on a single subject—like operations or marketing—lets you delve into a topic of interest and get a deeper understanding.

- Ideal if you want to level up specific skills or need to get up to speed on a project that demands a new skill set.

If you're bringing your team, consider spreading your reach by assigning each to a specialized track or having them attend concurrent sessions. Together, you can compare notes across the board to form a game plan for your return to the office.

Make the most of networking opportunities

While education is the primary driving force for conference attendance, don't overlook the valuable connections

gained from networking. But for many (even extroverts) breaking the ice in-person can feel awkward. Just like with education, preparation is key to getting the most from your networking.

Start by aligning your networking strategy with your goals. Who carries experience in the areas you aim to grow? Are there speakers who might provide useful insights beyond their presentation topic? Review the conference schedule to create a shortlist of five to seven people you'd like to connect with while onsite. Then, head over to social media to connect with them. Look for personal posts and stories that can help you ease into an introduction. Do they love snowshoeing with their Australian

Shepards on the weekend? Break the ice by mentioning their posts and your own Aussies. Did they just return from a trip to Chile? Ask them what they liked best about it. There's plenty of time to talk shop. But starting with common interests, it becomes easier to transition into business talk once you've established a rapport.

Catersource + The Special Event offer a helpful mobile app to support your pre-conference planning. Use it to save sessions, connect with other attendees, and even make appointments with people you want to meet one-on-one.

Last but certainly not least, don't forget the tradeshow! Find time between breakout sessions to walk the floor and browse company booths. Create a tradeshow bucket list beforehand to ensure you see the products and make the connections you need to support your "one thing."

With a solid MVP in place—that is, Minimum Viable Plan—you can get more out of this year's conference without succumbing to post-conference exhaustion and overwhelm. ●

See Christie Osborne live during her sessions at Catersource + The Special Event!

Future-proof Your Marketing:
How to use analytics & data for sustainable success

Put Your Heart into It: Secrets to creating an emotional connection with your ads

What Veteran Marketers Want You Know, But Are Too Polite to Say

Marketing Masters 2023: Effective Marketing Strategies for Wedding and Event Professionals

Christie Osborne is the owner of [Mountainside Media](#), a company that helps event industry professionals and brands develop scalable marketing strategies that bring in more inquiries and leads. Christie is a national educator with recent speaking engagements at NACE Experience, WIPA and the ABC Conference. Christie regularly shares industry insight in her Catersource column, as well as on [SpecialEvents.com](#), [Wed Altered](#), [Rising Tide Society](#), [WeddingIQ](#) and NACE's industry blog.



STEAL THIS



(Above) A dramatic ribbon adds depth to this invite. | Design by A Good Day Inc. | Photo courtesy Jennifer Wilson & Charla Storey



(Right) Cool washes of watercolor in deep green-blue with a splash of shimmering gold create visual interest on this modern wedding invitation suite. Design by Momental Designs | Photo courtesy O'Malley Photography



(Left) A ribbon ties together this invitation set printed on translucent paper. | Design by A Good Day Inc. | Photo courtesy Beautiful Life Studios

INVITATION

Inspiration

The artists who hand-craft invitations and other stationery play a large part in setting the tone for an event before guests even arrive. Invitations are the chance to create a mood

and get people excited to attend a celebration. Today, we're seeing a return to classic, elegant styles, with fun touches like layers of craft paper, elaborate illustrations, monogrammed wax seals, and dried flowers. Get inspired by these intricate, trendy designs. ●
— Amanda Nicklaus

Continues on next page.



Layered paper held together with a frayed fabric ribbon creates a tactile experience. | Design by August Sinclair | Photo courtesy Rodeo & Co

● ● ●
STEAL THIS



(Above) Clean classic designs with minimalist additional cards are very popular. | Design by and photo courtesy Epitome Papers



Bright patterned craft paper is on trend. | Design by Roseville Designs | Photo courtesy Brooke Allison Photo



(Above) Simple designs accented by embossed paper. | Design by Roseville Designs | Photo courtesy Brandi Crockett Photography

(Right) Bright, vibrant colors are part of a larger trend of bold hues and striking patterns. | Design by and photo courtesy Caroline's Collective



This wedding invitation set is held together with a vellum belly band and copper wax seal. | Design by Epitome Papers | Photo courtesy Ali Lou Photography



18th Century still life paintings inspire ornate details such as illustrated baroque details, calligraphy envelope liner, antique art envelope liner, hand dyed silk ribbon, and a custom vellum pocket. | Design by Letterland Studios | Event by Sinclair & Co. Design | Photo courtesy Stephanie Mason & Co



Elegant illustrations and vintage stamps pair together for a classic look. | Design by Roseville Designs | Photo courtesy Julie Shuford Photography

STEAL THIS



(Below) Everything retro is in vogue, as is reflected in the colorful stripes and sunny details on this invitation set. Design by Gus and Ruby | Photo courtesy Jessica K Feiden Photography



(Above) Various forms of binding add texture to multi-piece invitations. | Design by Gus and Ruby | Photo courtesy Kelsey Reagan Photography



Traditional paper invitations mix with etched acrylic pieces. | Design by A Good Day Inc. | Photo courtesy Beautiful Life Studios

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Maximizing Social Proof in 2023



Social proof is more than just a marketing tool; **it builds confidence within your audience, ensuring new client relationships start off from a foundation of trust.**

By Meghan Ely

To succeed in 2023, businesses must establish authority in their market. Social proof comes in many forms—industry awards, five-star reviews, press features, and word-of-mouth referrals are all powerful ways to influence potential customers. But social proof is more than just a marketing tool; it builds confidence within your audience, ensuring new client relationships start off from a foundation of trust.

For interested clients, there is a lot of pressure to find the right vendors for their events. That's where third-party credibility comes in—it confirms their decision to inquire and provides a credible reason to hire you.

Of course, social proof is nothing new. In fact, it's already everywhere. From the countless Amazon reviews influencing our choices to celebrities endorsing their favorite toothbrush, we constantly look for others to confirm our purchasing decisions. And the fact of the matter is that it absolutely works! Time and time again, statistics show that Millennial and Gen Z consumers trust online reviews just as much as personal recommendations.

But how does social proof fit into the event industry? Third-party credibility is an expected part of the sales and marketing process, especially as the market increasingly fills with Millennial and Gen Z professionals and engaged couples. So whether you serve corporate events or weddings, it's time to leverage social proof to your advantage.

If you are behind the curve, use these effective strategies to earn publicity and highlight your brand's social proof to draw in more customers.

STREAMLINE YOUR TESTIMONIAL REQUESTS

Client reviews are invaluable for establishing trust with potential clients, so make sure you are collecting testimonials after every event. There are many platforms to consider—Google, Facebook, The Knot, WeddingWire, Yelp—so pick one or two and start amassing positive reviews. Collecting more reviews also provides valuable feedback to improve your internal processes!

Testimonials are best collected when the event experience is still fresh in their minds, so build requests into your offboarding workflow. If you already have an email template, simply add a few lines and make it easy by linking to your review site(s) of choice. Don't forget to follow up if you have not heard back!

RAMP UP YOUR EVENT SUBMISSIONS

Event features are the low-hanging fruit of event publicity, as you have already done most of the work by executing a flawless event! All that is left is submitting it to blogs and other industry publications. Real event features continue to be one of the most effective ways to win over potential clients, so take advantage of this easy opportunity.

Third-party credibility is an expected part of the sales and marketing process, especially as the market increasingly fills with Millennial and Gen Z professionals and engaged couples.

To get started, think about events that have taken place in the last six months. Then, look ahead to consider the events that will rise to the top this year. What will be the most editorially-friendly celebrations? Be mindful to focus on the types of events that you want to book again, as that is the clientele you will attract from your earned media features.

OFFER EXPERT QUOTES IN THE MEDIA

There's more to press features than published events. Event pros are in a great position to provide expert quotes to the media. When writers prepare articles about the industry, they need insights from inside sources like you. When you become part of the conversation, you stand out as a thought leader who knows the ins and outs of the industry. Plus, you get to earn valuable backlinks to boost your SEO efforts. Double win!

All it takes to put yourself out there is a brief email introduction to editors that cover topics related to weddings and events. Spend some time researching ideal publications and how to connect with their editorial team. Keep your audience in mind, as you'll want to focus on media outlets that will attract your ideal clients.

LEAN INTO PODCASTS

Podcasts are an excellent way to share expertise, showcase your personality, and add to your press portfolio. There are many wonderful event industry podcasts, including B2C shows geared toward engaged couples and B2B shows

geared toward vendors. So if you are a talker, there is no reason not to jump into the world of podcast interviews!

Take some time to sit down and see what podcasts stand out to you. For many, applying is as simple as filling out an online form or sending a friendly email pitch to introduce yourself. But before you do, prepare a shortlist of topics you can speak on with key takeaways that listeners will learn.

APPLY FOR AWARDS

Third-party accolades are the best social proof you can find, so keep an eye out for "best of" lists and awards that fit your brand and would impress your ideal clients. In many cases, you can self-nominate your business by

submitting your body of work to the judges, so curate your portfolio to include the best of the best!*

DISPLAY SOCIAL PROOF EVERYWHERE

So you've earned some fantastic press features—now what? If you've got it, flaunt it! Social proof is only effective in sales and marketing when you show it off. Consider showcasing press, awards, notable leadership positions, and other accolades in these areas:

1. An "as seen on" section on your homepage and active landing pages
2. A dedicated press page on your website (wait until you have three or four to start!)
3. On social media profiles, like your Instagram bio
4. Your email signature

You and your team do incredible work, but it's time to get some recognition! Testimonials, media features, and awards demonstrate your experience and expertise, so don't be afraid to let others sing your praises in 2023. Once you start maximizing the power of social proof, you'll find that it takes far less effort to influence prospects and close your sales!

Editor's Note: Keep an eye out for submissions to open for the **ACE and GALA awards this spring! ●*

Meghan Ely is the owner of wedding PR and wedding marketing firm **OFD Consulting**. Ely is a sought-after speaker, adjunct professor in the field of public relations, and a self-professed royal wedding enthusiast.

You can see Meghan Ely in-person at Catersource + The Special Event, taking place March 27–30 in Orlando, FL during the following sessions:

- **Social Proof: Understanding it, Earning it + Leveraging it in the Event Industry**
- **What Veteran Marketers Want You Know, But Are Too Polite to Say**

For more information, visit <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/>

ENJOYING AT THE ALTAR IN *Cincinnati*

Nestled on a corner in the “Over the Rhine” neighborhood of Cincinnati, Ohio is what appears to be a gorgeous German gothic church. Sweeping spires, stained glass. Look closer. The French doors read, *The Transept*. Inside, a unique, historic, and unforgettable Cincinnati event venue awaits.

It was this venue, housing four unique spaces on four floors, that hosted the Leading Caterers of America, a prestigious group of some of the top companies in catering and events, this past November 2022.

The theme: Renaissance Masters – Art of a Different Palate. **The food:** small plates divided amongst six stations, plus local beers, a bourbon flight tasting, and cocktails at bars on every floor.

From basement to balcony, each level held a distinct delight for guests to happen upon. With Funky’s Catering Events (soon to be DelightMore) as venue owner and in charge of all food and libations, the event was a rousing success. ●

— Kathleen Stoehr

All photos courtesy Shae Huth (Gameday) and Funky’s Catering Events



In the Bridal Tower, a wedding dress changed patterns via nearby projection.



Projections of Renaissance masterpieces as well as florals and other artistic scenes changed throughout the evening.



Be-wigged, costumed beauties welcomed guests and mingled amongst them, adding to the fun of the event.



The “Porkopolis” station was the centerpiece of the Assembly Room, where congregants once gathered long ago for Sunday service.



Beautiful jewel tones were echoed throughout via décor and florals.

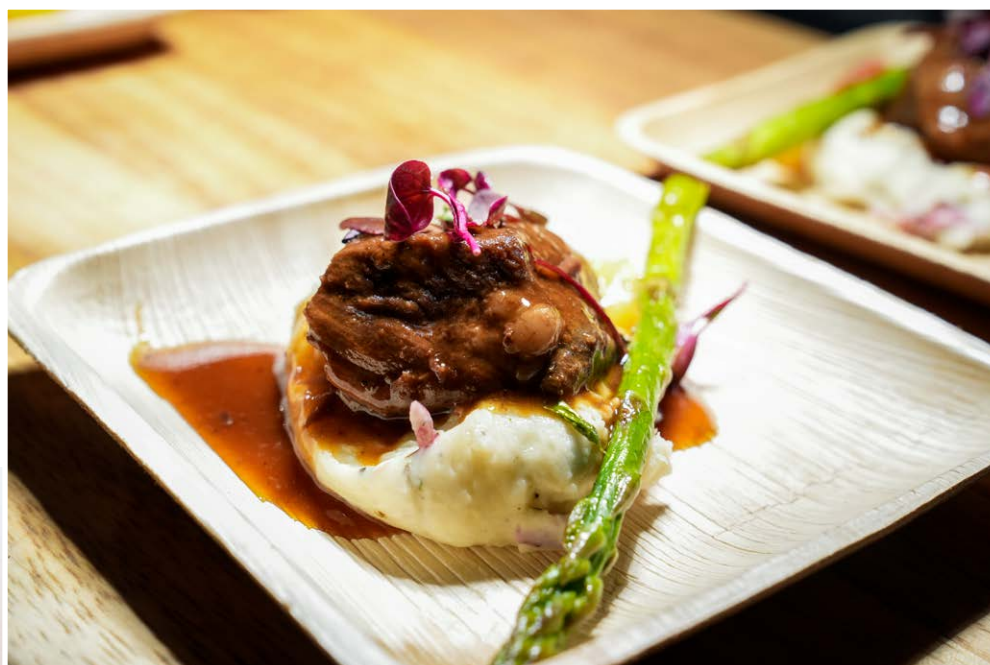
ENJOYING AT THE ALTAR IN *Cincinnati*

A “make your own candy bar” station in the balcony area was interactive fun for guests and completely on trend.



A small plate station in the Assembly Room offered a choice of Braised Beef short rib with red wine demi glaze with Boursin herb mashed potatoes or Vegan Bourguignon with vegan mashed potatoes.

Both were served with roasted lemon-scented asparagus and grape tomatoes.



Also in the balcony area, a “Blazing Cream Puff Station” with caramelized bananas and cherries jubilee captured the attention of many, especially when sous chef Sam wielded the bourbon.



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Four Tech Solutions You Don't Know You Need (Yet)



When it comes to tech, less truly is more.

By Nora Sheils

Virtually every business uses technology in some capacity, whether you're recording Reels in the studio or scheduling Zoom calls to meet with clients. Yet the power of technology extends far beyond the basics of social media and video conferences—two areas that have existed digitally for over a decade.

In fact, new virtual solutions emerge for businesses every day. For some, it can be exhausting to sort through the noise and identify the essentials from the non-essentials. Before you know it, you've signed up for countless software trials, while that notebook and pen seem comforting.

With tech, less truly is more. If you're just starting out, take it slow and add one tool at a time. For those with a tech stack bursting at the seams, run an audit to see what no longer serves you and consider pulling back. Not only will you save money (subscriptions add up!), but you'll also find more flow with fewer logins and platforms to stress over.

If you're all-in for a minimalist approach to technology, here are four critical areas to lean on tech—whether you know it or not.

A CONTRACT AND INVOICE MANAGEMENT PLATFORM

Life is stressful—and for consumers, a complicated billing process can be the final straw that pushes them into the arms of a competitor. As hospitality

professionals, it's our duty to simplify our clients' lives and take work off their plates. If you're still expecting to maintain your booking rate with paper contracts or clunky billing software, you'll find it difficult to keep up with prospects who demand convenience from service providers.

Instead, opt for software that can send digital contracts for e-signature and automate invoices for easy billing. It might take a few hours to create templates (some member success teams will do this for you!), but once you're all set up, you can let it run like clockwork! Not only will your clients love the streamlined process, but you'll also free up valuable time in your schedule without needing to recreate it for every client.

A PROJECT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM YOU ENJOY

There's no denying the value of a project management system. Delegating tasks, setting deadlines, attaching files, and sharing feedback are essential steps for keeping your projects organized and on time. But with so many project management tools available, it can get discouraging to try a few and find that none fit your needs.

Task and project management is one area where it's vital to test a platform's experience before diving headfirst. Fortunately, many popular options—like ClickUp, Asana, and Trello—offer free plans for users to determine whether it's a fit.

As hospitality professionals, it's our duty to simplify our clients' lives and take work off their plates.

Before overwhelming yourself with too many trials, consider what type of system best suits your work style. Do you prefer a clean and simple to-do list to keep you on track? Or does your business model call for a more robust system with automation, dashboards, and other advanced features? Get clear on what you need from a project management platform first. Then, find a few that align with your vision and give them a shot.

A RELIABLE AUTOMATION TOOL

Technology offers power and flexibility; there's no reason for event pros to clutter their to-do list with unnecessary tasks. Automation relies on preset formulas to run on autopilot, freeing your time (and your team's) to address more important responsibilities. Let's face it—you didn't start a business to respond to every inquiry in 30 seconds or create new folders on Google Drive. Let an automation tool handle those small, repetitive tasks so you can get back to the creative work you love!

Before jumping into Zapier or any of its competitors, check your existing software first. Many platforms for client relationship management (CRM), project management, and email marketing offer automation features that can save you from the extra subscription cost. It might require upgrading your plan, but you can't beat the efficiency of native automations!

A PLACE TO STORE, TRACK, AND ANALYZE YOUR NUMBERS

Bookkeeping may not be the most exciting part of running a business, but you must know your numbers to keep the lights on. Even if you have an accountant or financial consultant, it's wise to monitor your income and expenses as they can influence your business decisions. For instance, if

you realize a particular service sells more than others, you may focus your energy on marketing that offering.

Many business owners start with a spreadsheet of data points: leads, sales, expenses, etc. But as your company grows, it'll become increasingly difficult to track and analyze your numbers manually. Even if you enjoy math, your time is better spent elsewhere! There are plenty of options for digital bookkeeping, like QuickBooks, FreshBooks, or Wave. If you work with a bookkeeper, schedule a recurring meeting to ask questions and run through your reports with an expert.

Beyond these four solutions, most business software is useful, but not essential for keeping the ship afloat. So, start with your foundation, then add other apps and programs as you see fit. Just be careful to avoid tech overload by implementing one new tool at a time! ●

Nora Sheils is the co-founder of *Rock Paper Coin*, the first software platform to bring together wedding planners, couples, and vendors into one system for managing and paying contracts and invoices. She is also the founder and lead wedding planner of award-winning firm *Bridal Bliss*. In addition to recognition by *Portland Business Journal* in its 40 Under 40 series, she also earned a spot in *The BizBash 500* for 2021.

Upgrade Your Tech Skills During Catersource + The Special Event!

Want to learn more about business technology? Catch these sessions at this year's Catersource + The Special Event, taking place March 27–30 in Orlando, FL.

- **Best Technology to Organize Your Business** (Liza Roeser)
- **More Than Another Solution: Uncovering the Many Sides of Event Tech** (Katie Mast)

More information can be found at <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/>



As you establish your marketing strategy in the new year, don't miss out on the often-untapped potential of a strategy that puts your client physically in front of you.

Catch Ian Ramirez in person at Catersource + The Special Event in Orlando this March!

You can learn more at his session **Shock & Awe: Experiential Marketing at Your Wedding Venue**.

Why Experiential Marketing Matters to Your Business

By Ian Ramirez

Marketing your business in 2023 can often feel like a guessing game, especially in this digital era where your client has a plethora of online platforms attracting—or distracting—them.

As people are glued to their handheld devices, it may seem like a daunting task to stand out on their path to saying 'yes' to your business.

Between word-of-mouth marketing, wedding expos, and print advertising—tried and true marketing efforts over the years as always—some of the more crucial aspects of today's client experience (emotion, engagement, and experience) are neglected.

This is where you can shine and what I want to talk about at Catersource + The Special Event in March: a strategy that allows your client to actively participate in an experience, evokes an emotional response, and increases their overall engagement.

This is experiential marketing.

The Three Es

In essence, experiential marketing is a strategy that offers direct client engagement through interactive or participatory experiences.

Millennials and Gen Z crave and expect memorable, exciting, and innovative experiences. They constantly want to be 'wowed' by everything they encounter. Truthfully, they want to be included in the **experience**, which in turn, makes a lasting impression.

A major advantage to these in-person experiences is exactly that: it brings them to you.

In addition to bringing the client to you, experiential marketing is the perfect vehicle to prime the senses,

ignite the imagination, and cultivate a feeling or emotion within your client by incorporating specific details and sensory experiences that draw them into the world of the event.

This is more than just storytelling. This is the co-creative process, which capitalizes on their desired outcomes—evoking **emotions** and engaging the senses—allowing the client to build on the story in their own minds and build a personal connection with your product or services.

In turn, this makes the experience more memorable for the client, and as Maya Angelou says, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

While building a personal connection to your product, experiential marketing invites the client to **engage** in an activity or other interactive components. This step is crucial in understanding the overall 'why' behind this underutilized strategy, as we put the client in the mindset of saying 'yes.'

On a technical level, we create a micro-commitment, which in a nutshell, is anything that requires them to agree to and carry through on a commitment. One small action can lead to future larger actions.

Through multi-sensory, in-person experiences, we can move the client from observer to active participant, which in turn increases overall engagement of the client and leads to increased sales. ●

***Ian José Ramirez, CSEP**, is the Co-Owner of Madera Estates, an award-winning Spanish- and European-inspired wedding and event venue located in Conroe, TX.*



Leading Caterers of America (LCA) is comprised of the top caterers and event venues in the United States and Canada. When you need a caterer to make your next event exceptional, perfect and delicious, choose a LCA caterer.

Planning something special?

Let the best of the best in all things events be your guide.



Corporate

LCA specializes in corporate events of all types - marketing, celebratory, client related, employee morale, and others. Whether held in the host's facility, or in an off-premise location, LCA members are able to deliver a high value corporate event experience.

Photo Credit: Catering Creations



Weddings

At its collective portfolio of some of the most desirable wedding venues in the United States and Canada, the LCA caters many thousands of weddings annually.

Most LCA members have dedicated wedding specialists on staff to ensure this most important day is executed flawlessly, no matter the level of complexity.

Photo Credit: Bonura Hospitality Group



Social

Bar and bat mitzvahs, First Communions, quinceañeras, retirements and graduations, and even funerals are all important life cycle events. Superb food and service are crucial to making these events special and memorable, and the LCA is a perfect resource for those products.

Photo Credit: Catering by Michael's



Nonprofits

Galas and fundraisers are key to the success of most charitable ventures - including both financial and membership. The LCA is highly attuned to the needs of most charities, and is a great resource for all the necessary components to make these gala events successful.

Photo Credit: G Catering

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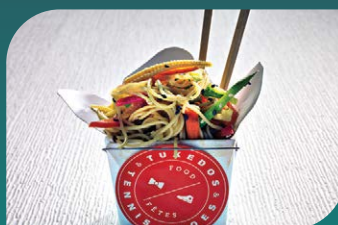
Photo Credit: Zilli Hospitality Group



SOUTH

Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas

Photo Credit: Bill Hansen Catering



WEST

Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington

Photo Credit: DSquared Hospitality Company



EAST

Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia

Photo Credit: The Classic Catering People

Learn more at [LeadingCaterers.com](https://www.leadingcaterers.com)