

Rocking Chairs - Valley Chairmen and Chairwomen

Written by Written by Christine Whitton / Photographed by Jackie Mercandetti
Thursday, 01 April 2010 01:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 30 March 2010 16:17

Ever wonder what it takes to throw an elaborate bash like Beach Ball, Drive the Dream, Heart Ball, Suns and Stars, Oscar Night America and Hope Ball? Well, we've invited Arizona's best and brightest chairmen and chairwomen (who have raised insurmountable sums for Valley organizations this year) to share their behind-the-scenes tips on what it takes to put on such an in-depth soiree and how you can incorporate their advice in your own springtime fetes.

Beach Ball



This year's Hamptons-style 17th annual Beach Ball was a nod to the star-studded Long Island, N.Y., destination. Paige and Dan Wheeler and Kari and Paul Yatkowski, of last month's summery soiree, helped raise money and awareness for the Phoenix Children's Hospital Neuroscience Institute. Donors spent the evening wining and dining amid a backdrop of Zowie Bowie tunes at the luxurious JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort.

Chairmen/Chairwomen: Paige and Dan Wheeler; Kari and Paul Yatkowski
In Attendance: 925 guests
Amount Raised: \$750,000-plus

How do you go about creating a guest list?

Kari and Paul Yatkowski: Phoenix Children's Hospital has a tremendously loyal following of donors and sponsors. Each year, the return rate is 80 percent or higher. As chairmen, we also look to our friends and contacts with Valley corporations who we know support children's causes. I have been so humbled by the support of so many who truly understand the importance of Phoenix having a world-class children's hospital.

Is it ever O.K. to send an e-vite instead of a formal invitation?

Kari and Paul Yatkowski: In an age of cost savings and maximizing the net amount raised, printing expenses and paper costs plus postage can add up to be a significant number. I feel a responsibility to maximize the amount of the donor's gift going to the cause and less to the cost of the elements of the event.

How far in advance do you typically send out invitations?

Paige and Dan Wheeler: At least six weeks. There are so many events to compete with on any weekend.

How do you go about choosing a theme?

Paige and Dan Wheeler: I like to do things that would be unexpected.

What do you like to serve?

Kari and Paul Yatkowski: For appetizers, I prefer easy-to-eat and something with a little staying power. I hate to think of a guest going into the main meal famished. I think the entree should be something that isn't overly complicated. I think people would rather have something that is prepared perfectly than something that swings and misses.

Oscar Night America

This past March, Valley A-listers gathered at the Arizona Biltmore Resort and Spa for Oscar Night America, Phoenix's only officially sanctioned 82nd Annual Academy Awards viewing party, to benefit the Arthritis Foundation's Greater Southwest Chapter. Chaired by Deborah Bateman and produced by Dave Dodge, guests received the official program that is distributed to Hollywood guests and swag bags filled with some of the Valley's most sought-after treasures.

What is the difference between chairing a gala for 500 versus an event for eight?

Deborah Bateman: The challenge of being able to make each guest feel special and appreciated.

Is it ever O.K. to send an e-vite instead of a formal invitation?

Dave Dodge: There are incremental events that lead to the big night - like fundraisers that are very important today with the current economical environment - that e-vites would be O.K. But it has to be custom to the event and the organization, no clicking or downloading. Make it simple for the receiver.

What do you like to serve?

Dave Dodge: I like it to be simpler rather than an over-the-top presentation. Sometimes, if a meal is over-thought it becomes very complicated and confusing. Guests like quality, taste and presentation, three things I always look for. And dessert should be smaller rather than bigger; remember, less is more with sugar.

What do you never serve?

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Deborah Bateman: Foods with an overpowering odor. The last thing you want is an overwhelming smell in the room.

What's your rule of thumb as far as how much food and beverage to serve?

Dave Dodge: What's the budget? Everyone wants to have a great meal. But if it's between five courses and a full bar, I'd say skip the starters and have two fabulous first courses, a simple dessert and make the wine worthy of the price tag.

Drive the Dream



This past January, Childhelp and Barrett-Jackson partnered for the sixth annual Drive the Dream gala. Kicking off the annual Barrett-Jackson car auction show at WestWorld, chairwomen Missy Anderson, Jinger Richardson and Susie Wesley entertained guests with an evening of dinner, dancing and a live auction that benefited Childhelp.

Chairwomen: Missy Anderson, Jinger Richardson and Susie Wesley
In Attendance: 730 guests
Amount Raised: \$1 million-plus

How do you narrow down the guest list?

Missy Anderson: You don't. The more the merrier if you are not limited by space.

Is it ever O.K. to send an e-vite instead of a formal invitation?

Missy Anderson: Personally, I am not a fan of e-vites due to the fact that many people, like myself, do not check their e-mails on a regular basis. I would only send out an e-vite for small get-togethers with close friends and only if it is last-minute planning for the event.

How do you go about choosing a theme?

Jinger Richardson: Depends on speakers or entertainment. Some organizations deal with children, health or the arts. Combine the charity with the talent to make a theme.

Susie Wesley: This will sound odd, but most of my event themes have come to me in a dream - which is why I keep a pad of paper next to my bed.

What do you never serve?

Susie Wesley: Fish and lamb. Fish because you can never be 100 percent sure there won't be a strong smell, and lamb because most people don't eat it.

Missy Anderson: Escargot, lots of garlic and delicate fish.

What's your rule of thumb for calculating how much food and beverage to serve?

Jinger Richardson: I make a lot of food. Years ago, I threw my husband a 40th birthday party and ran out of food when eight extra people showed.

Missy Anderson: For dinners in my home, we always prepare double for great leftovers.

Do you have any favorite favors that you like to give guests?

Susie Wesley: We have so many wonderful choices, but budget is the biggest factor. For some events, I have forgone a favor other than a personal thank you note - which has become more common in the last couple of years.

Missy Anderson: I like to give pretty, small silver picture frames that can double as their place card holder.

Hope Ball

This month's annual black-tie Hope Ball, benefiting the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Desert Mountain Chapter, is honoring local heroes for their medical, corporate and civic commitments at the InterContinental Montelucia Resort and Spa. The evening's chairwomen Sheryl Bettencourt and Linda Gatzulis will entertain invitees with a superb five-course meal, a live and silent auction and a night full of dancing.

What do you never serve?

Sheryl Bettencourt: Anything awkward like shellfish or anything not tried and tested. This is not the time to debut something you're not comfortable with. Comfort food and little bites paired with some great wine and good conversation is what makes for a memorable evening.

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What is your favorite gift to receive as a hostess?

Sheryl Bettencourt: Anything scented. Candles, flowers, bath products or fresh herbs—something that can be enjoyed in the future and that I'm not pressured to use that same evening.

Do you have any favorite favors that you like to give guests?

Sheryl Bettencourt: It is important that what you give people when they leave your party is something that they can use afterwards. That way, they will remember you every time they use it. I love wine stoppers, bar tools and gourmet treats. Favor Affair (www.favoraffair.com) has some great ideas.

Linda Gatzulis: And make sure that every other person gets something different.

Suns and Stars



Last month's fifth annual Suns and Stars gala, chaired by Kathy Colace, afforded several residents the chance to mix and mingle with the their favorite Phoenix Suns players. Held in Downtown Phoenix, special guests and musical legends Kool and the Gang took to the stage while benefactors enjoyed dinner and a live raffle that benefited the Phoenix Suns Charities. In the nonprofit's 22-year history, the Phoenix Suns Charities has donated more than \$9 million to several worthy Arizona organizations.

Chairwoman: Kathy Colace
In Attendance: 1,000 guests
Amount Raised: Estimated \$1 million

How far in advance do you typically send out invitations?

Kathy Colace: We send our first save-the-date five months prior to the event.

How do you decide what kind of music should entertain the guests?

Kathy Colace: Our goal is to have the music give energy to our event. We want our guests to dance.

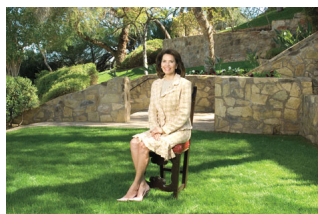
What do you like to serve?

Kathy Colace: We rely on the expertise of the chef and his/her creativity. We provide a beef/fish combination plate.

What do you never serve?

Kathy Colace: Chicken.

Heart Ball



Celebrating 50-plus years as one of the Valley's oldest and most successful gala events, The Phoenix Heart Ball has fundraised more than \$20 million to date for the American Heart Association. This year, Sarah Suggs Cheek will oversee a committee of 100 highly committed women as they set the ball in motion for planning November's event aiding Halle Heart Children's Museum and the American Heart Association.

Chairwoman: Sarah Suggs Cheek
In Attendance: Estimated 850 guests
Amount Raised: Estimated \$1.75 million

How far in advance do you typically send out invitations?

Sarah Suggs Cheek: About six weeks before.

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What is the difference between chairing a gala for 500 versus an event for eight?

Sarah Suggs Cheek: The logistics of a small, intimate dinner versus a large gala are tremendous. Among them are the locations which will accommodate the larger audience, catering capabilities, entertainment, décor and guest list composition, among other things. For a small gathering, a committee is not required to execute the event—another large difference. Additionally, dinner for eight can be spontaneous, whereas a ball requires much more lead time.

What is your favorite gift to receive as a hostess?

Sarah Suggs Cheek: My husband and I often give a bottle of our favorite wine to our hosts to enjoy at a future time. We often receive the same, and it is always appreciated.

What do you like to serve?

Sarah Suggs Cheek: My husband and I enjoy menu planning. We often serve grilled items as an entree with sides that vary with the season and nature of the evening - casual, holiday, winter or summer. We try and make it a savory, yet healthy, meal to enjoy with wine.

What's your rule of thumb when it comes to calculating how much food and beverage to serve?

Sarah Suggs Cheek: We generally know how many portions for each course, but for more relaxed get-togethers we adjust according to the length of the party. Of course, a skilled caterer removes all of the guess work!