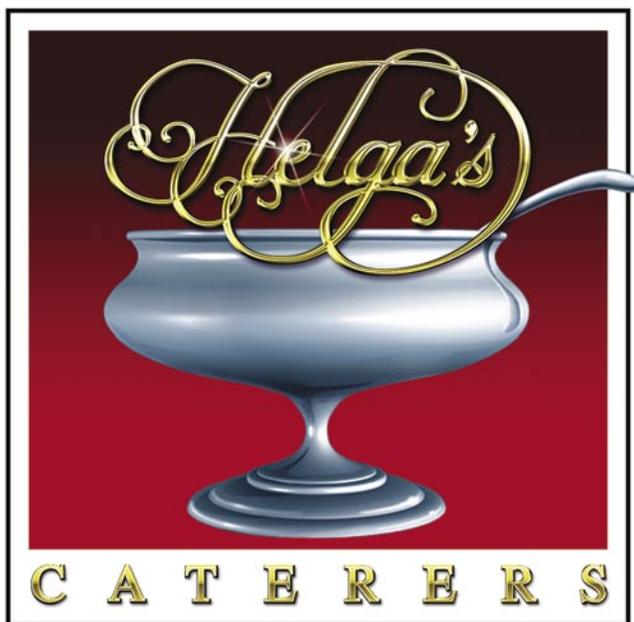


Guide to Exceptional Get-Togethers & Weddings





For over 20 years, Helga's Caterers has been helping our clients plan and enjoy exceptional parties, weddings, reunions and business functions. Of course, everyone knows the basic tips for a successful event, including the value of planning ahead and staying organized. But during our decades of experience, we've come across little tips many people *don't* know, but that make a big difference. We always share these tips with our clients. And now, we've put 20 of the very best ideas together in this booklet. You'll find ideas on inspiration, planning, partnering with experts, picking a location, choosing and using food to enhance your event, plus flourishes that make events special. Enjoy these tips ... and use them to enjoy truly exceptional events.

Michael Evans
President
Helga's Caterers

Inspiration

Awards Banquets: Plan decorations and backgrounds for a “photo friendly” podium.

Open Houses: Liven up conversation and mingling with multiple refreshment tables.

Fund-raisers: To support a great cause in style, use a most-from-every-penny strategy.

Galas: Look for a theme or creative “touch” that will make the occasion memorable.

Political Rallies: Try a historic location that reflects your message.

Weddings: Decide your “wedding profile” before you begin planning — from a *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* bash to a small, informal celebration.

Grand Openings: Tie in a theme, like “*Just a Taste of What's to Come.*”

Graduations: Choose “fun food” to raise the energy level of these celebrations.

Holiday Parties: Send invitations *early* requesting the “gift of your presence.”

Reunions: Do you have a lot of folks involved with planning, choosing favorite foods, and making special requests? A professional caterer can smooth family politics to make sure everyone stays happy ... and nothing falls through the cracks!

Birthday Parties: Even if you're celebrating casually with a backyard BBQ, don't forget to make a great entrance with a GREAT cake.

Anniversaries: Try “early days” photos as centerpieces.

Bar/Bat Mitzvahs: Of course include Kosher-style catering ... *and* wonderfully fun food presentations that will be remembered for a lifetime.

Success Celebrations: Mark a promotion or achievement with a special get-together and consider inviting a Mystery Guest — perhaps the honoree's elementary school teacher who always knew this student would be a great success!

Baby Showers: No weight worries here — indulge the mom-to-be with luscious pastries or a show-stopping cake. For an extra special gift that will be treasured for years, bring a video camera so everyone can record a wish or bit of wisdom for the baby.

Planning

Checklists, quality controls and more checklists! As a professional caterer, I can tell you that these planning tools are absolutely essential to our success in coordinating multiple parties and handling thousands of details. In this section, we'll share some of our techniques that can help you make your event a smooth success. For starters, you want to take some time and visualize your event — close your eyes and walk through it in as much detail as you can, from start to finish. This exercise takes a little time, but you'll find that the time you invest enhances your creativity while helping you anticipate and avoid problems. In addition to doing this mental walk-through of your event, you'll see best results when you rely on the following proven planning techniques.

1. Include everybody in the planning process

Think for a moment about all the “stakeholders” in your event. If it's a business function, employees, suppliers, customers and members are involved. For a family party, you want to delight relatives and friends. You don't need to bring them all together in one room, but enlisting their help in thinking through each phase of the planning assures a much smoother, much more rewarding event.

2. Be very clear about the purpose of your get-together

Whether you're planning a family reunion or a sales meeting, taking a moment to clarify your purpose helps you create the right setting, mood and format for your event. For instance, if the purpose of a function is for people to mingle, meet and network, *don't* choose a sit-down dinner as a buffet creates far better movement and interaction.

3. Define the “personality” of your event

Obviously, a gala fund-raising celebration has a very different personality than a working lunch and you'll want to choose food, locations, and formats accordingly. But in addition, you want to think carefully about the people you're inviting. If your wedding rehearsal party, for example, is going to be the first time the two large families meet, your goal is to put everyone at ease. Even the most elegant and expensive party will flop if the food, location or format make your guests feel uncomfortable.

4. Create a master plan

Put everything down on paper. Writing down each step helps you spot things that are missing *before* they cause a problem. In your plan, you want to include week by week, day by day action steps and identify who is responsible for what, plus names and numbers for all key contacts such as your caterer, hotel, limousine service, etc.

5. Be prepared for emergencies

We don't like to think about things going wrong. But by thinking about them

ahead of time, we can keep little crises from becoming disasters. For example, what if people drink far too much at the party to drive? Be prepared with numbers for taxicab services or people who can drive guests home. Plus, it's always a good idea to have a basic First Aid kit on hand and someone who knows CPR.

Choosing expert partners

Whether you're planning a wedding or a business event, you simply can't do it all yourself. You need partners. But partnering is more than just burden-sharing. A good partner can help you host a fantastically successful event — without breaking the bank. To enjoy maximum support from your partners, use the tips we've shared in this section.

6. Work closely with the experts

The more your caterer or hotel staff understands your event, the more valuable they can be. Make sure you share your goals with them. Brief them on who will attend, including how many guests you expect, how they will arrive, whether lodging is part of the event, etc. And of course, make sure your partner understands your budget. In addition, take a few minutes to talk about what you've liked (or haven't liked) at other people's weddings, reunions, meetings or other events. Experts can use this information to make suggestions and create just the right event for you.

7. Keep everyone in the loop

Consider setting up a website. This is particularly valuable so out of town guests can see that they've been reserved at a particular hotel. Even family reunions and weddings can take a page from business event planners and use the web page to give everyone a schedule of events, list who has RSVPed, who's staying with whom and where, what time the events are, directions to locations of the events, and other important details.

8. Consider “one-stop” solutions

Events involve so many factors: locations, food, flowers, entertainment, transportation ...! The more people involved, the more chance there is for important details to be overlooked and for problems to occur. Without help, you'll find yourself having to ready the site, shop, cook, store food and clean up. And even the *best* organized person simply may not have the time or experience to ask the right questions and keep everything moving on a smooth timeline. That's why it's often wise to choose suppliers who can not only help you, but handle more than one aspect of your event. At Helga's, for example, our clients enjoy the fact that we are their single source for flowers, the site, music, and of course, food. Not only is it easier, but we can often create synergies and economies that result in substantial savings.

Location

If you're planning an event in the Washington, D.C. area, you have the opportunity to treat your guests to some truly wonderful sites — and create albums filled with gorgeous pictures. Almost anything is possible! When we first met with one of our brides to plan her wedding, I asked, "What's the feeling you'd like to create for your wedding?" She thought a moment and said, "I'd like to feel connected to tradition and to the past. I'd love for everyone to feel they were 'time traveling' to our wedding." That's just what guests *did* feel! We arranged everything at one of Maryland's most beautiful historic riverside settings. As guests arrived by boats at sunset, everyone was truly enchanted.

9. Your site should reflect your goals

Your site sets the tone for the entire experience. A historic site is the perfect choice for a business meeting that wants to emphasize heritage or founding principles. FedEx field is a great backdrop for a theme of teambuilding. For fund-raising events that focus on growth, consider a garden. Try an art gallery for sales messages and tie in the theme, "The Art of Serving our Customers." You don't have to comb historic registries or tourist sites. You can browse over 50 beautiful sites right on Helga's website: www.helgascatering.com.

10. Make sure your site is the right size

Your site should fit your guest list: don't try to squeeze too many people in! On the other hand, don't pick a huge, crowd-size site that will make a small gathering feel uncomfortable.

11. When you think location, think photos

You're not just choosing a site for an event: you're also choosing a backdrop for your wedding album or annual report photos. If it's a business event, those photos can be great for ongoing public relations, so pick your site with an eye to what will serve you not just at the event, but in your publications, advertising, or website, too.

Food & drinks

We know that drinking can be a major part of "making merry." It can also be a big part of your bill — especially when you let hotels and other venues provide the alcohol! If you don't mind the hassle of stocking your own bar, you may want to find a caterer who will let you provide your own beverages. Helga's offers this option and it is often a good way to stretch a budget a little further.

12. Match the menu to your goals and guests

You'll enjoy a much more successful event if you "match" menus rather than "pick" them. For example, instead of just picking a cocktail menu, decide which cocktail menu offers the right food for your guests' tastes as well as the right theme for your event.

13. Order the right amount of food and beverages

Of course you never want to pay for more food than your guests can enjoy. But skimping on food sends wrong message about you and your event. It also sends guests packing as soon as they can slip away. It's far better to use little secrets for filling guests up without emptying your budget. For instance, a carving station certainly looks lavish, but it really lets you serve fewer pieces of food per person! Again, a good partner can make the difference in helping you here.

14. Don't skimp on taste or nutrition

Bland, ordinary food costs the same as tasty, gourmet choices. Work with a good caterer and you can serve quality meals that are beautiful, delicious, health-conscious and COST-conscious, too. And again, remember that your selections should reflect your guests and your message. At Helga's, for example, our great-tasting selections have earned us repeat business from the American Heart Association.

15. Use food creatively

Enjoy the fun of serving something different — without risking "extreme" foods that no one appreciates. Let an experienced caterer be your guide. Also, if your budget is tight, consider saving on flowers by using gorgeous desserts as the table centerpieces (if you're on a tight timeline, this saves on serving time, too!). Plus, food can do double duty: a gourmet coffee bar, for example, encourages networking by bringing your guests together and giving them something to start conversations.

Flourishes

Everyone wants to create a memorable, one-of-a-kind event. But not everyone has a huge budget. Not to worry: there are dozens of little touches that can make ordinary tables, china, linens and food ... dazzling! For example, the artful use of simple cut flowers and greens can rival the beauty of expensive bouquets. In the same way, simple yet delicious food that is artfully presented can make a far greater impact than far more costly dishes.

16. Try new themes for parties

Instead of a traditional Bridal Shower, one of Helga's clients held a wonderful Family Heirloom Shower where guests treated the bride to "gifts with a story." And these treasures don't have to be expensive! One of the favorite gifts at this party was an Aunt's prized recipe for cheesecake written up with anecdotes about how that cheesecake had saved the day after many a bump in the Aunt's married life. The heirloom idea also translates wonderfully for baby showers, though our favorite theme for mothers-to-be is an Advice Shower where each gift comes with an index card featuring a tried and true tip for mothering the new baby.

17. Make it memorable

Use party props (like sports whistles for an athletic theme). Offer themed party favors like golf balls or chocolates personalized with names or the logo of your event. Elegant bags of cookies are perfect for guests to take home from holiday parties. Favors can even include “action” items such as sending guests off from a fund-raiser with a goody bag that includes an extra pledge card they can share with a friend who wasn’t present for the event. Or, “hire” dozens of free photographers to capture those candid moments by placing disposable cameras on the tables.

18. Make everyone comfortable

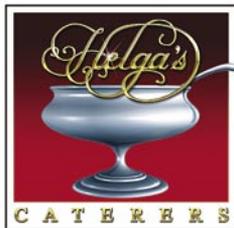
Once you’ve chosen the right setting, food and decorations, there are a few more secrets for ensuring everyone enjoys themselves. For starters, help guests with **what to wear** – it’s very uncomfortable to arrive over- or underdressed! You can include terms like “Black Tie,” “White Tie,” “Informal,” or “Casual” on the invitations. You can also offer guidance by mentioning what you will be wearing. Also, consider if **name tags** are appropriate. They can do a lot to break the ice even at large wedding rehearsal parties if you add a little extra to them: *Sally Jones, cousin of the bride*. Just make sure they’re pre-printed so they’re attractive and readable (computer generated nametags can be as elegant as hand-calligraphy!). Finally, **place cards** can make or break a gathering! Carefully planned cards eliminate the awkwardness of deciding where to sit – no one feels left out. Plus, they give you the opportunity to match up old friends, give each table a “talker,” separate antagonists, or help everyone meet someone new.

19. Consider special needs

Make sure you think about guests who have dietary requirements or who may need special accommodations such as wheelchair access. Provide for these needs in a gracious, understated way that will not call attention to your guest.

20. Don’t forget the extras

No matter how carefully you plan, there are sure to be leftovers. You can ask to have the leftover food given to a charity such as a homeless shelter. This is always a generous gesture. For a business, political, or fund-raising event, it can also have PR value.



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