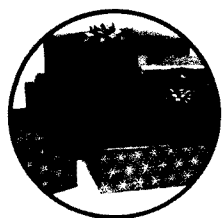


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HOLIDAY OFFICE PARTIES GUIDE



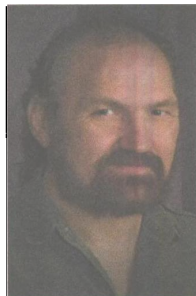
A SECTION PREPARED BY THE STAFF OF THE MIDLANDS BUSINESS JOURNAL

Sparkle, food, drink options highlight party trends for many companies

by Tess N. Sykes

More detailed, enhanced lighting design tops the list of popular requests for office parties this year. That extends from table displays with added sparkle to LED lights for creating just the right mood.

"We're investing more and more in lighting and lighting technology," said Terry Cossel, owner and operator of Grand Illusions.



Cossel

LED lights allow for dramatic displays while using far less power and fewer outlets, meaning lighting can be added to walls, tables, almost anywhere to create the right dimension or look.

"Lighting helps bring it all to life," he said.

In 2011, the recession continued to mean fewer and smaller holiday office parties, Cossel said.

"A lot of people will also wait until January to hold a party," he added. "Sometimes there are deals to be had in January when buildings aren't so full."

For those considering a holiday party, the time is right to begin thinking of a theme and checking dates.

"Everything flows from the theme," Cossel said. "Most people go in with the idea they want to have a party. We help them brainstorm and think about what is it you want to accomplish with the event. Once we have that, and a budget, the rest is easy as a general rule."

To create a winter wonderland, Grand Illusions staff once used green, blue and white lights inside the Pershing Auditorium. The lights were set to show off refrigera-

tor boxes decorated with snow blankets to look like mountains and covered in Christmas trees of different heights.

"It really did look like guests were walking through a moonlit mountain night," he said.

Traditional holiday themes and colors are always popular.

When it comes to food and drink,



Regan

popular themes are wine or micro-brewed beer paired with foods, locally-sourced foods, signature cocktails, fruit-infused soft drinks and spirits, wine or beer infused into traditional recipes, said Patricia Regan, owner of Patricia Catering.

"Themes can be based around what's hot on TV, such as a Mad Men-themed cocktail party, a corporate brand and personality, or even something new happening in the community," she added.

Ice sculptures that help highlight a dis-



Kay Telford, director of the Scott Conference Center.

play table or beverage service stations and crystals, "anything that sparkles and catches light," are popular, Regan said.

The Scott Conference Center decorates in reds, pinks and gold for the holidays, said Kay Telford, director. Other holiday party trends for the year are still in the making.

"Most gatherings are in the evening with a couple during lunch and one during the

cocktail hour," she added.

December is shaping up as the most popular month for parties, edging out January this year.

"We have found the Courtyard Marriott less than one block from the Scott Conference Center to be an asset for those who do not want to drive after the festivities," Telford said.

This is really the time for event planners to focus on location and date, rather than the details.

"The most important decisions right now is scheduling the space and knowing the approximate number of guests," Telford said. "It is early for the other details."



Planitomaha planned this holiday party at the Scouler Ballroom.

(Photo courtesy of planitomaha.)