

So You're Planning to Stage a Special Event

Are you planning a grand opening for your new business? A ground breaking ceremony for a new building? Perhaps your business is celebrating a significant anniversary and you want to have a party to commemorate the occasion.

Inside these pages, published by *Greater Olean Area Chamber of Commerce*, we've put together 7 Easy Steps to planning and staging a special event – steps ranging from selecting the date to getting media coverage.

Staging an event can be easier than you think. Just read through this booklet and utilize the basic information presented to help plan your event. If you wish to request the services of *Greater Olean Area Chamber of Commerce* for your event or have any questions please contact Erica Dreher, Membership Outreach Coordinator, at (716) 701-4013 at least two weeks prior to your event.

This information is provided as a service by:

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Step One: Selecting a Date

Selecting a date is one of the most important decisions you'll make as you begin the process of planning and staging a successful event. It can affect all subsequent steps and is worth very careful thought. Before you make your decision, here are some important things to consider:

- Allow plenty of time to plan and prepare.
- Be aware of major holidays and special events in your area.

Avoid holding your event on those days. If you are trying to attract bankers or government employees, take note of the special holidays their offices may be closed.

- Try to avoid a conflict with community events and activities.

You can find information about local events from newspapers, radio stations, social media or by calling the Chamber at 372-4433

Step Two: Choosing the Best Time of Day

The time of day you choose to hold your event is also crucial to its success. It's an important step in the planning process and helps to determine the type of special event that you'll conduct.

Morning events are most successful if they begin no earlier than 8:00 am. It is often difficult for people to attend very early morning events, and they may avoid the event rather than be embarrassed by arriving late.

Luncheon events are often successful since most everyone eats a mid-day meal, but they require more advance notice in sending out invitations. Many people schedule luncheon appointments weeks ahead, and they will need to be notified as early as possible to get your event on their calendar.

Late afternoon or early evening functions are also successful. Perhaps it is because guests can stop by an event on their way home, or that the day is over and there are no more business matters to interfere with guests attending your event. The best time for an evening event is 5:00-6:30 pm, allowing everyone a chance to "drop-by".

Step Three: Developing an Invitation List

Invitations may be extended to the general public or may be limited to civic and government leaders, chamber staff, news media, employees, customers, and close friends.

- ***Greater Olean Area Chamber of Commerce*** has compiled a VIP Mailing Label list that is free to chamber members and a \$10 charge for non-members. The list consists of local dignitaries, and civic and government leaders.

Once you have identified your guest list, here are some tips to remember when inviting them:

- Prepare a written personal letter or basic invitation form. Whatever you do, keep it simple and to the point. If you choose to do an elaborate invitation, get professional help from a graphic artist or designer.
- Check to make sure that all the basic information is included: who, what, when, where and why. It is also a good idea to include a map or very clear instructions on how to get to the site of the event. Send your invitations by first-class mail if possible.
- While it is impossible to predict how many people will attend, you can usually figure between 25% and 50% of those invited will attend. It is advisable to ask for RSVP in order to plan your supplies accordingly.
- Allow ample notice. If the event includes a meal, allow three to four weeks notice. For smaller, informal events, a week to 10 days should be sufficient.

Remember, the shorter the notice, the harder it will be to secure prominent officials.

- Always provide easy-to-find and accessible parking for your guests.

Step Four: Serving Food and Beverage

Although it's an added expense that you may prefer to avoid, serving food and beverage of some kind is almost a necessity for a successful event. No matter what time of day your function is held, people will expect that something to eat and drink will be served. Here are some hints:

- For morning events, coffee, tea, juice, fruit and pastries would be perfect. Unless you're in the restaurant business or wish to go overboard to impress your guests, a full breakfast is not necessary
- For luncheon functions remember that this is the mid-day meal for most of your guests and they will expect some kind of sandwich or buffet meal at minimum.
- During late afternoon or early evening events, light hors d'oeuvres or finger foods are appropriate. Chips, dip, cheeses, vegetable plates, or cold cut meat trays are perfect.
- If you choose to have a dinner or late evening party for your guests, make it exceptionally nice. If you are asking people to spend most of their evening with you, they deserve something special.
- It would be wise to enlist the help of a professional caterer for medium or large events. If you don't have the time, manpower or talent to provide your own food and beverage caterers can give you good solid advice and are not as costly as you might fear. Call the Chamber for a list of our catering members.
- If you decide to provide your own refreshments, be sure to have an ample food and beverage supply for your guest, as well as sufficient plates, napkins, cups and other supply items. Don't forget the trash cans. The deli sections of large grocery stores often offer fresh vegetable trays, fruit trays, and meat & Cheese platters with advance notice.

About alcohol-alcoholic beverages are suitable only for late afternoon or evening events. Many people enjoy an after-work cocktail and it can add to the enjoyment of your event. At events where alcoholic beverages are served, always have something non-alcoholic for those who do not wish to drink. If serving alcohol, contact the NYS Liquor Authority regarding a liquor license permit, and your insurance company regarding liability. If using a caterer, ask to see their liquor license permit.

Step Five: Planning a Program

Whether you're staging a ground-breaking, a grand opening, or an anniversary celebration for your business, it adds a nice touch to have a brief program of some kind. It provides not only valuable recognition for you and your key people, but it makes the event more purposeful and allows you to explain more about your business.

Consider these points when planning your informal program or formal ceremonies:

- The shorter, the better. People have very brief attention spans at events such as these, and you might lose a large part of your crowd if the program drags on too long. As a rule of thumb, no program or official ceremony should last longer than 15 or 20 minutes, with 10 minutes being the ideal.
- Your program should be led by a good, effective master of ceremonies. He or she can keep your program moving smoothly and inject some humor or lightness when needed.
- Limit the number of speakers and the length of their speeches. Speakers taking part in the program should include appropriate city or country government officials, a Chamber representative, and the head of your organization. A microphone should be available for your speakers if the group is over 25 people.
- Conclude the program with some appropriate symbolic activity to commemorate the event: a ribbon-cutting for a grand opening, shoveling the first load of dirt for a ground-breaking, or cutting a cake for a 50th anniversary of your business. These are nice ways to let the guests know the formal program is over and they also create good publicity opportunities for your photographer.

If your event includes an open house or tour of your facilities, be certain that friendly and knowledgeable employees conduct group tours. Unguided self-tours by your guests are not nearly as valuable as guided tours.

Be sure to send thank-you letters the day after your event to anyone who played a key role in staging it, particularly those who took part in the official program.

Rain can do more than just dampen your spirits, it can drench your guests and your program as well. Always try to have a back-up plan for a rainy day, which may involve moving indoors at your place of business or to a nearby restaurant, hotel, or meeting room. Large canopies or tents can be rented for outdoor use.

Consider having some kind of door prize drawing or giveaway as part of your program.

- Winning a sample of your product, a weekend trip for two, or dinner at a nice restaurant can add to your guests' enjoyment of the event. Also have a professionally written outline of your products or services available for your guests.

Step Six: Getting Media Coverage

The best way to achieve good media coverage is the same for any other publicity campaign. Remember, even if the media is very interested in attending your event, an unexpected news happening could pre-empt your event. Armed with that realism, remember that there are some concrete things you can do to enhance the chances that it is your event which they choose to publicize.

- Send your invitation, notice or press release to the new director or business editors at least two weeks ahead of your event, and include a personal letter or note explaining some of the details about your business such as why your business or event is different or has some significance to the overall community.

- Get the word out on your social media outlets, too.
- Be sure that your letter or press release contains the journalistic basics of who, what, where, when and why. Your release or letter does not need to be fancy just factual. It is always a good idea to follow-up with a letter, note or phone call a few days prior to your event.

Your best bet is to hire a photographer and have him/her take a glossy black and white photo of the key people at your event. Then mail it out to all publications you wish to have coverage in, with a brief but clear caption. Also, it is appropriate to send a copy of the photo to each person in the photo.

Step Seven: Use the Chamber's Services

By reading this booklet, you're already taking advantage of some of the help available to you from the *Greater Olean Area Chamber of Commerce*.

And there's more...The Olean Chamber offers the following services to assist you in the

- Attendance at your event by Chamber representatives
- Remarks at your event by the Chamber President or spokesperson during ceremonies
- Big Ribbon Cutting Scissors
- Send your details to the Chamber if you would like our assistance in getting the word out.

Some Final Thoughts:

The previous pages have, we hope, given you a clearer picture of what must go into the staging of successful special events. They don't happen by accident-they take careful thought, planning, and attention to detail.

The following are some helpful hints to make your event a memorable one for both you and your guests:

- Have people from your organization serve as greeters.
- Have a guest book available for attendees to sign.
- Don't forget to have pictures taken of the event. Post these pictures prominently where your employees and customers will have a chance to see them after the event is over.

Good Luck and Best Wishes on a Successful Event!