

September 2009

charlotte HOSPITALITY NEWS

Assembling All the Ingredients for a Great Celebration— From a Caterer's Perspective

By Holly McLelland

Delectables by Holly has been a member of the local NACE Chapter since 2006. We always look forward to partnering with other fellow NACE members and industry professionals to sponsor monthly meetings. So in early June when Jennifer Osuna, the Marketing and PR director at Delectables by Holly and NACE Board Member, suggested we sign on to cater the August meeting, I agreed with the knowledge we would have to challenge ourselves to hit a new “high note.” You see, we would be following the National NACE Experience! Conference, which was held right here in Charlotte in July. Yes, that’s right. We’d be following industry superstars and local heavy hitters like The Westin Hotel, Crawford & Company Florist, By Design Event Group and many others. And, even though in my mind I was shaking in my boots, in my heart I knew that we had the goods to pull out all the stops. It’s here that our journey began.

It started as all parties do: with a wish from our customer. In this instance, Jennifer Osuna expressed that everyone at NACE had been working so hard for so long to insure the conference in July would go down perfectly that we needed to provide an over-the-top event to show our thanks to the entire group. “A celebration,” she said. “A fun party that transports you to another place, like a staycation, a journey to faraway land.” And poof! Like magic, the mission statement for this event was born. I gathered my team at



Delectables by Holly with two things on my mind: effectively communicating the specific mission for the NACE event and...fish tacos. (In the creative process, sometimes all you need is one little “toe hold,” a glimmer of an idea. Fish tacos were the glimmer for me on this one.) We proceeded to plan our voyage without ever leaving Charlotte. And yes, during our first stop, we served fish tacos with Ahi Tuna and Mahi Mahi.

Instead of describing the entire event for you, (go to www.charlottenace.com for these details and photos) it is more important to me to take the time to say an emphatic and heartfelt thank you to everyone who worked so hard to make this party a success. First,

to my incredible team, our Executive Chef, John Cutitta and his crew out did themselves. I've been around a long time. This was good food. Not just good "off premise" food. Good food, period. I was very proud of and for our kitchen team. Then to my posse, a group of talented, creative forces to be reckoned with: Joy Gray, Ellen Robertson, Jennifer Osuna and Angie Hoos. It is my pleasure to work with you each day. And a special thank you to my friend Lou Petrozza of Hell's Kitchen fame for working the action station at the fish taco stand. It's always big fun when Lou is around.

Thank you to Tom, John and Angie who allowed us to transform The Palmer Building into a cruise ship, three ports of call and the Lido Deck with the corresponding food and décor. I was inspired by their helpful spirits and how they went way out of their way to help us make this special. Plus, they were so enjoyable to work with.



Pam Bailey, owner of Flowers from the Cellar, came in on this project early on and was actually in on some of the planning sessions. Pam is a guru of floral design and went above and beyond the call of duty to make the flowers, centerpieces and decorative portals from one destination to the next conversation pieces in and of themselves. Then, there is Elaine Strohl and her daughter Jaime Clemons at First Impressions Party Linens. Elaine went out of her way to design a special custom linen for the registration table at this event. I've worked with them for more years than either of us wants to admit. My good friends at Party Reflections, Douglas Crowe and Laura Davey jumped in to donate all the rental items, no questions asked. I called them, explained what we were trying to do, and they didn't hesitate. They take great care of us at Delectables by Holly all the time. Thank you to Dan Hooks, too. Then, the "other Holly" (that's what we call

each other) Holly Lunn at Extravaganza graciously donated her time to meet with us and provided all props for this event. Also, a special thank you to Mark at Extravaganza. Vinny Esposito at Split Second Sound was there for us again. Just as he always is. Thank you, Vinny. You are the man. And then new friends of mine, Three Little Birds Stationery for the amazing program designed to look like a passport and photographers Tommy McCart and Diane Mason for the memorable images. The pictures captured all the amazing aspects of the party. I am so thankful and proud to have them. I think it's noteworthy to point out, these are companies who give of themselves time and time again. I look forward to working with you all again soon.

The event was made even more extraordinary by the presence of two very special guests, Greg Casella, CPCE, our NACE National President and Bonnie Fedchock, NACE National Executive Director. It was such a pleasure to have them as part of the celebration. We didn't want the evening to end, but we were very happy to be part of such an amazing event. Our mission was accomplished! We are proud to be associated with all of the innovative and talented professionals that make up the NACE Charlotte Chapter and look forward to being involved in future events.

Holly McLelland is the owner of Delectables by Holly, the catering destination for higher expectations. For more information, please visit www.delectablesbyholly.com. Photos courtesy of Tommy McCart Photography.

