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The After Party

When One Celebration Just Isn't Enough

By Laura Urbani

It's one of the most important days of your life. So why let it end so early? Enter the after party, an increasingly popular event that prolongs the festivities.

According to Bonnie Walker, owner of Creative Affairs/Bonnie Walker Events, based in Pittsburgh and New York City, the after party isn't something new, but it is starting to catch on in the western Pennsylvania area.

Couples still hold a traditional reception, which accommodates older guests and very young guests. But when "Last Dance" winds down the reception, some guests get geared up to get the party started.

"Some are satisfied with (the reception) and go home," says Walker. "The majority of people who are (at the after party) are friends and peers."

The after party provides a safe location for attendees to continue the festivities, especially if the event is held at a hotel where most of the bridal party is staying. If alcohol is involved, it's a matter of looking out for your guests' safety, says Walker.

Couples can have the after party information added to the invitations for all the guests to see, or control the number of guests by inviting them separately.

Darlene Coons, catering manager for the Omni William Penn Hotel in Pittsburgh, says she has had some requests for the after party. "It's becoming more a wave of the future."

The Omni will host its first after party in September. "They'll have a DJ and comfort-type food," says Coons, adding that mini burgers and Reuben sandwiches will be featured on the menu. "They've eaten a lot of food by then, so you're not going to go too heavy."

Walker agrees that careful selection of food is a must.

Some brides choose small gourmet pizzas. Others may choose omelets for parties that stretch into the early morning hours.

Walker likes to create a special dessert room, which can feature a candy station, specialty cupcakes or a popcorn station.

"In the dessert room you can have everything imaginable," says Walker. "I like to have a variety."

Although the dessert room can be in a separate room, it can still be scheduled during the reception and then replenished for later in the evening.

For an after party, everything about the event changes from the entertainment to the decorations.

"Some are satisfied with (the reception) and go home. The majority of people who are (at the after party) are friends and peers."



"You continue the bar, but you may change it to a wine bar or a signature drink," says Walker. "Instead of having a sophisticated wedding band, we have a DJ or an entertainment troupe."

One of the most requested after party themes is the Moroccan room. Walker designs the room in vibrant colors, and features low tables and oversized, cushioned pillows. Large swags of material billow from the ceiling, providing an Arabian tent feeling.

Walker has also had requests for Tuscany parties and Patisserie parties, which feature servers in Can Can dresses.

A couple who met on an African safari asked Walker to recreate that adventure for their after party.

"We had tons and tons of incredible foliage," says Walker, who also used a lot of animal prints and African percussionists.

Another popular theme is South Beach, which is "a very modern nightclub feel," says Walker.

"The key to the after party is making it all about the bride and groom," adds Walker. "It should reflect their personalities."

It's no secret that couples can shell out some big bucks for a wedding, so how much more will they need for the additional celebration?

"If you're creative you can work around any budget," says Walker. "You have to have the time to create the picture in your head. You can do t--is in any budget. It's not difficult." **WE**

