



## WHAT WORKS

# Party On

HOLIDAY BASHES SHOW APPRECIATION FOR EMPLOYEES, AND THEY DO WONDERS FOR MORALE **BY TODDI GUTNER**

**THERE'S THE SALESPERSON** who woke up naked in the conference room. And the aspiring manager who saw his plans go up in smoke when he mistook the boss's wife for his daughter. Everyone seems to have a story about bad behavior at an office party. Even so, 94% of all companies gave an end-of-year celebration last year, says Dale Winston, CEO of Battalia Winston Amrop, an executive search firm that polls companies about holiday plans.

Parties, says Winston, are particularly welcomed by employees of small businesses. "They are crucial for small companies that don't have institutional events to bring employees together in a festive and social way," says Winston. John Challenger, president of outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, says even if money is a little tight and you have to choose between a party or giving bonuses, throw the party. "Celebrations help to create a culture and commu-

nity within your company," he says.

To start planning, determine whether you want to invite only employees, or if you would like to include partners or vendors. Set your budget by deciding how much you would like to spend per

person. For less than \$50 per person, you can hire a caterer to come to your office. A luncheon or dinner at a nice restaurant will run you at least \$75 per person.

Renting a trendy party space, such as an art museum or nature center, can set you back \$2,500 to \$5,000. Entertainers can also liven things up. Jugglers and fortune tellers typically cost about \$600 per entertainer for four hours. GSE Construction in Livermore, Calif., which builds treatment facili-

ties for water and wastewater, has an annual dinner during which entertainers pass out gifts to the 100 employees of the \$36 million company. Sometimes a joke-telling Santa does the honors. Last year two *Sopranos* imitators did so at a local Italian restaurant with bocce courts. The cost was \$100 per person, or \$10,000.

Your employees might appreciate something out of the ordinary, such as a boat ride or spa day, but you don't have to spend a great deal to boost morale. "Any opportunity to show appreciation is important, especially since there are so few perks when you work for a small company," says Maureen Brozacchiello, owner of Creative Display Solutions in Lynbrook, N.Y. As her company has grown, so has its holiday celebration. Two years ago she gave a dinner party for the five employees of the \$1.1 million company, which designs, produces, and manages trade show displays. This December, a chauffeured limousine will take her 11 employees to a fancy dinner in New York.

Many party planners say employees are happy simply with good food and presentation. Popular this year, says Jeremiah Green, vice-president of Corky's Catering in Chicago, are specialty cocktails, individual desserts such as cheesecake lollipops, and ice-sculpture vodka luges, in which vodka slides down ice ramps into glasses.

No matter where you hold your event,

**Celebrations help your company build a sense of community**

remember that where there is alcohol, there is often inappropriate behavior that could lead to claims of sexual harassment, unsafe driving, or accidents. To avoid problems at her dinner last year, Brozacchiello served only beer and wine and asked the restaurant manager to let her know if anyone had had a few too many. And she made sure designated drivers were on hand. With proper planning, your employees will remember the party for the right reasons. **SB**