

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE GUILBAULT

NATURAL ASSETS



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Kim Giffen (left), facility and events manager at Alpine Ski Club, and Julie Carter, co-owner of Men With Knives Catering.

A stand-out event requires a superb venue

Logistics are an important part of planning an event. But professional event planners know that logistics is really just the point where success starts.

Yes, you need to know where people will sit, what they will eat, and how many rooms you'll need – whether you're organizing a wedding, a conference, or a trade show, these details matter.

But the pros who really make their event stand out, who craft a truly memorable experience for their attendees, look far beyond that.

“Every event has a tone, a feel, a brand-awareness,” says Kirsti Suutari, marketing manager at Alpine Ski Club. “The best event planners know how to incorporate that to make their event memorable.”

The key, she says, is to look at

the event through the eyes of the participants rather than the organizers, and use the venue's assets to full advantage.

Use nature to refresh

Anyone who has attended a conference at an anonymous hotel knows how deadly the afternoon sessions can be. People have just eaten lunch, they're starting to lose a bit of the energy they had in the morning, and the stale air and dull surroundings of a

hotel ballroom start to make eyelids feel heavy.

That's where Mother Nature can help out.

“Many of the events that we host include a fresh air break in the early afternoon,” says Kim Giffen, facility and events manager at Alpine Ski Club. “Attendees can step outside, even go for a hike up our ski hills and take in the fabulous view. They

come back inside refreshed, recharged and ready to get back to work.”

It's something that can be tricky to do in an urban setting – even if people are encouraged to leave the hotel, many of them will instead find a place to sit in the lobby and check emails, defeating some of the point of a break.

In a rural location, even if attendees don't step

outside, just the view of natural surroundings can be energizing and refreshing.

“In the fall, the geese feed on the fields up above us, and you get massive flocks of them flying over the clubhouse,” says Kim. “In spring and summer, we get red-tail hawks and even eagles nesting around here. We see deer... sometimes followed by coyotes.”

“It's quite something to hear a room fall silent because everyone turns to watch an eagle soar by. It's a great moment.”

Play time

Taking that idea a step further, many event planners like to take full advantage of the assets found throughout southern Georgian Bay to build some creative play into their events.

A multi-day event can include a few hours exploring the

caves, mountain biking, golfing or even sea kayaking on the Bay.

“Companies find it's a great way to build a team,” says Kim.

The open lawns around Alpine Ski Club's expansive clubhouse are also ideal for group activities, including giant Jenga, or lawn Yahtzee with oversized dice.

Even single-day events can take full advantage of the toys on-site at Alpine Ski Club. “We've had weddings that include a Jenga tournament on the lawn after the ceremony or after dinner,” says Kim. “It's fun and memorable, and something that lets guests mingle and get to know each other.”

Dining matters

Of course, quality food is a vital part of any well-planned event. Alpine Ski Club has partnered with Men With

Knives Catering to provide seamless on-site food & beverage service.

“This clubhouse was designed to have a superb kitchen space,” says Julie Carter, co-owner of Men With Knives. “Most people never see it, because it's designed not to intrude on the event space. But it's incredibly flexible and functional, and allows us to feed an enormous number of people in a very short time.”

Members at the club have been delighted with the food offerings in the new clubhouse, enjoying dishes as diverse as Vietnamese lamb wraps (called larb), or Georgian Bay salad Niçoise; catering options are completely customizable, of course, but often draw heavily on the local food offerings available in the region.

Room size

No matter what size of

event is being planned, it's important to match it to the size of the room. “We designed this facility with several different room sizes and configurations, so that events can flow seamlessly,” Kirsti explains.

The clubhouse has hosted events for 50 people and events for 750, without anyone feeling either lost in a too-big space or cramped.

Many event organizers take advantage of the 3,100-square-

foot patio – complete with fire pit. Since it's only separated from the largest hall by a wall of glass and doors, there's no difficulty moving everything indoors if the weather turns bad.

“When you rent our space, you have exclusive access to the property and to our staff,” says Kim. “We work with our clients to ensure that every aspect of the event is a success.” **DS**

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