

RSVP ASAP: *Erie's Event Planners Know How to Please a Crowd*

By Vanessa Paris

Whether it's a personal party or a corporate retreat, an intimate gathering or a big bash, black-tie or costume-themed, planning a successful event often requires significant time and effort. Don't have the time or effort to spare? Or just want to make sure everything's taken care of so you can relax and enjoy yourself? No problem: Event planning and execution experts—like Erie Event Planning and Hughie's Audio-Visual & Staging—are available to handle the details for you, start to finish and everything in between.





Erie Event Planning: The Name Says It All

The tagline on Erie Event Planning's brochure says, "When it's that important...we've got a plan!" And indeed they do.

Founded by Cynthia Brugger and Kimberly Clear in 2005, Erie Event Planning is broad in scope. The full-service business handles a wide range of events, including fundraisers



Erie Event Planning Owners, Cyndi Brugger and Kim Clear.

and galas, parties, meetings and seminars, conventions, open houses and promotional events, dinners and luncheons, and of course wedding receptions.

Each woman brings different skill sets to their partnership. Brugger, a former eighth grade science teacher, was chairperson for the Millcreek School District Science Department for several years; Clear has been involved in finance, recruiting, marketing and promotions in both corporate and academic environments. The two met through the Millcreek School District,

where they worked on projects together.

"We're both meticulous and made a great team," explained Clear. "We both had planned events in the past and started talking about all the creativity we had brought to them."

They agreed that Erie was ready for a business such as theirs.

"There was nothing set up for planning and coordinating events with that extra something special," said Clear, "and we thought, 'That's what Erie needs.'"

"What we really offer is organization and making an event as perfect as possible, with attention to detail," elaborated Brugger.

Getting started

In their first year, Erie Event Planning focused on developing relationships with vendors, from florists to restaurants to equipment rental companies. "We did our homework ahead of time," explained Brugger.

They met with many companies to get an understanding of what they offered, including their specializations, their pricing and how much lead time they'd need.

"All of the vendors have been so encouraging to us," Brugger added. "And now, we know what they offer and we're not wasting time later on."

During the first year, they also developed their marketing plan and materials.

"We've met with a lot of businesses here in Erie just to let them know we exist," said Clear. "We've let them know what we can do for them if an event comes up. Rather than make it last-minute, we've been providing information that they can use on an as-needed basis."

Erie Event Planning has been developing their Web site as well, and they're open to taking on events outside the region.

Already, the business has handled events for a number of clients, including non-profit organizations, professional organizations and law firms. They've organized and overseen monthly meetings, thrown fundraisers and galas, and even planned a big hoedown for a company picnic—complete with ponies, hay bales and a country band.

Erie Event Planning can step in at any point in the planning process.

"Some clients call with ideas and aren't sure how to make it work,"

said Brugger, "while others already have a theme, which case we can help them come up with a plan. Either way, we make sure we have something that the client is happy with, comfortable with and excited about."



Erie Event Planning will make your wedding reception memorable.

The difference: Enthusiasm and creativity

Not only does Erie Event Planning take all the guesswork and babysitting out of planning and executing an event, they enjoy doing it.

“I wake up in the morning with my head spinning with so many ideas,” said Brugger. “We have such great energy and are so excited about what we’re doing. It’s been really fun for us, and fun to get out there in the community and meet different clients.”

While they are typically working on four or five events at any given time, they are by no means maxed out. “We’ll do as many as we’re asked,” said Clear. “There’s really no limit.”

Brugger and Clear feel that the logistics of planning an event is overwhelming to many people, but they thrive on the details.

“Instead of being overwhelmed, they can hand it off to us—everything, from the invitations to finding a venue,” said Clear.

Erie Event Planning staff will even attend the event to make sure things are running smoothly.

“If something comes up, the client will not even know about it at the time,” said Clear, “because we’ll handle it and make sure everything is taken care of.”

Taking it to the next level

Brugger and Clear are emphatic: Making a decision to join Erie’s economic community was a deliberate one.

From an event planning standpoint, said Clear, “We want to take the companies that are here in Erie and raise them to the next level. Outsourcing their event planning needs can ease the burden on current staff as well as eliminate any need to hire additional staff.

“We know that Erie is ready for that now,” she continued. “And we want to be here for its corporate clients.”

Hughie’s Helps Make it Happen

As the old adage goes, the devil’s in the details. Whether you’re planning a production, getting a gala together or organizing an occasion, there are plenty of particulars—all of which need attention.

No matter what the event, Hughie’s Audio-Visual & Staging can help you pull together all the pieces and make sure it’s perfect. From business theatre to special events to live event production, Hughie’s prides itself on its experience, creativity, state-of-the-art equipment and a highly-skilled technical staff.

Growing geographically and technologically

Hughie’s was started in Cleveland in 1953, and originally called Hughie’s Flowers & Film Service. At that point, the demand was for audiovisuals and slide projectors rather than intelligent lighting and hi-def screens. But over time business has grown in many aspects; Hughie’s now has offices in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Montana and services customers nationwide with high-tech solutions.

“Technology is always changing, and we pride ourselves on

staying ahead of the curve,” said Michael Steinmetz, senior account representative. This means continuously upgrading equipment as well as purchasing new, technologically advanced equipment.

“The owner of our company has a good sense of what’s out there, what’s new and what’s coming,” described Steinmetz. “He spends a lot of time researching, so lots of times we’re the first company to introduce something that’s new, and I think that gives us an edge.”

In fact, Hughie’s has recently increased its inventory tenfold.

The business now offers theatrical lighting, rigging, staging, outdoor roof systems, concert audio systems and more. Plus, Hughie’s has complete event design, show production, coordination and implementation in addition to

Hughie’s Audio-Visual & Staging handles everything from special events to live event production.



offering trade show booth design and client registration services.

“Hughie’s is truly a one-stop shop for all of your production needs,” summarized Steinmetz. “There are a lot of small A/V companies, but we can provide all of what the customer needs. We can show up in the semi truck with the whole ball of wax.”

Working as a team

The Hughie’s crew—with a staff boasting more than 100 years of combined industry-related experience represents a wide range of experience and knowledge.

“We believe in a team approach to projects and productions,” said Steinmetz. “Our people are our strength.”

“Let’s face it,” he added, “equipment is equipment, but service is what sets companies apart from one another. We realize this and are committed to offering the best service in the industry along with superior, state-of-the-art equipment.”

Oh, and some other stuff

In addition to traditional event management and production services, Hughie’s offers convention-related services, including:

- event registration services for conference and trade show attendees,
- customized software for automated badge printing,
- booth design, and
- various online registration options.

Hughie’s offers touch-screen LCD PCs and P4 laptops, laser and inkjet printers, and computer networking services such as network peripherals, cabling and wireless devices to connect from two to 200 computers. The company also boasts a full production-assistance department.

Going forward

According to Steinmetz, the growth will continue. Ten years ago, the company opened its Pittsburgh office; now Hughie’s can service Erie from two different directions and its eager to do so. Hughie’s is a *Trustee member*



Hughie’s offers a one-stop shop for production needs.

of the Erie Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership.

“Erie seems to be on the move toward attracting bigger clients, with the construction of the new convention center,” said Steinmetz. “We already have a tremendous amount of corporate clients in western Pennsylvania, but I can see that there will definitely be a lot more going on in Erie, and we’re looking to expand what we do here.”

He added, “Erie’s making a move...and we want to be there when it happens.”

The company prides itself on a highly skilled technical staff.

