

“ ON THE LIST ”

If you've ever wondered how certain caterers seem to be on all the exclusive and preferred caterers' lists in town, and you're struggling just to get noticed, here's your answer. Two caterers who are on numerous lists, and the event coordinators that partner with them, speak out on how to get on a venue list and stay there.

by Suzy Feine

GETTING YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR

When Gail Beltrone, vice president of Frederick P. Rose Hall at Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York, put out a Request for Proposal to a variety of caterers to gain exclusive rights to cater at Lincoln Center, she had a strict set of standards they needed to abide by. “We needed to have a caterer that fulfilled the following needs: someone that has elegance and great food, with top quality both on the food side and the service side. We also needed a caterer that could handle the fact that we don't have a designated kitchen facility,” she says. “Great Performances fulfilled all those criteria. We were very impressed with their overall organization; they have such great energy.”

The exclusive caterer for not only Lincoln Center but also the Plaza, Caramoor, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Wave Hill, Sotheby's and Mae Mae Café, and the preferred caterer for many others throughout New York, Great Performances researches each venue prior to submitting proposals. “We work to put together a portfolio of venues that complement each other, but that don't compete,” says Linda Abbey, executive vice president and partner for Great Performances. “We create a comfort level for each location we work with.”

When Requests for Proposals are not issued, many venues rely on past performance of caterers when selecting an exclusive caterer. “There have been times when we've had a relationship

with a venue already because we've done events there, and they want an exclusive relationship with us,” says Dan Licitra, general manager for Jordan Caterers in Cheshire, Conn. As the exclusive caterer for the New Britain Museum of American Art, Guilford Yacht Club and Lyman

HOW TO GET YOUR CATERING COMPANY LISTED AS AN EXCLUSIVE OR PREFERRED CATERER

Homestead, and a preferred caterer for dozens more local venues, Jordan Caterers' 25-year reputation helps them get noticed.

But it's not just a long-standing reputation that will get your foot in



Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola at Jazz at Lincoln Center. Photo by Chris Eastland

the door—location and size play a big part as well. “Jordan Caterers are really close to us so they could send someone over at the last minute if needed,” says Morgan Fippinger, manager of visitor and volunteer services and catering liaison between the New Britain Museum of American Art and Jordan Caterers. As the exclusive caterer at the museum, Jordan Caterers handles 45-50 events each week and also operates the onsite café. “They have the manpower, size and the ability to handle our busy event schedule,” she says.



New Britain Museum of American Art

STAYING ON THE LIST

To ensure you remain a venue's exclusive caterer, the most important thing is to abide by the venue's rules, notes Licitra. “Some venues have a noise curfew so we make sure if it's a wedding, the music ends at 11 p.m. so there is no backlash from neighboring businesses. It just comes down to following the rules of the venue, and many times, this is a source of frustration for venues and the thing that causes caterers to lose accounts.”

Accent on Venues

Catersource is pleased to announce a new department, Accent on Venues, which will be featured in upcoming issues of the magazine. Expanding on the entire world of event spaces—commercial, cultural and non-conventional locations—this department will discuss this most important topic from all angles including case studies, decision-maker profiles, trends and technical coverage.

Benefiting all of our readers, including caterers, venue representatives and vendors, Accent on Venues will provide in-depth knowledge of the venue market, exclusive and preferred vendor relationships, open venues, caterers specializing in venues and the competition for prime spaces.

If you have venue topics you'd like to see covered, please drop us a line at editor@catersource.com. **CS**

Great Performances - Photo by Julie Skarratt

Relationship building is another important aspect that will keep you on the preferred caterers' list and may get you bumped up to the exclusive list. "Our reputation opens doors for us, but we need to decide if we're a good match for each other," says Licitra. "To be successful, it needs to be a partnership; we're very conscious of that, and we always determine the venue's needs."



*The Atrium at Jazz at Lincoln Center
- Photo by Roberto D'Addono*

Building and maintaining a close relationship with the venue's staff can also give peace of mind to everyone involved. "We've found that it's been very helpful to have continuity in staff; I know exactly who the event planners, wait staff and captains are that will handle every event at the museum," says Fippingger. "We had an outside caterer come in one time and it was a nightmare."

At Great Performances, the work doesn't end with just providing great food and service. "Each venue requires us to work on their behalf and demonstrate that we can bring them business," says Abbey. And the beauty of this type of business building is that it's a two-way street. "Even in places where we are not exclusive but preferred, they are going to send business back to us."

GETTING NOTICED

"If I were a small caterer just starting out, I wouldn't try for exclusivity," says Licitra. "Instead, try to gather a local reputation first and explore the venues in your own backyard. Getting listed as one of many preferred caterers is much easier than gaining exclusivity, and once you get the first one or two, it becomes an easier process because you have references."

If you're relatively unknown in the area, or a particular venue is not familiar with your work, you might want to contact the venue and suggest a tasting. This will also allow those making the decision at the venue to meet and interact with your staff.

Above all, be sure your catering business is ready to handle the extra workload. "It's a matter of structuring your company in order to grow," says Licitra. "If we took on another exclusive or two, we could because we built the staff and infrastructure to handle that." **CS**

