



## Graduation Party or Open House Checklist

Your child's graduation from high school is a "signature" event marking the end of one phase of their life and the beginning of another. The right approach to planning the event will make the creation of just the right atmosphere easier.

### **Start early!**

Rental agencies start booking next June's parties right after school begins in the fall. (Hey, these are the same people that have their Christmas shopping done in July!) Seriously, you should have your plans pretty much in place by the end of February to the first part of March. Waiting until April or May puts you at a serious disadvantage in obtaining tables, chairs and other equipment. Every rental company has a limited inventory and when they're gone – that's it! Getting your reservation in early insures you get what you need.

### **Be forewarned!**

No rental company will reserve tables and chairs without a monetary deposit paid. This deposit is at least 50% of the total and is almost always non-refundable. Some companies require 100% prepayment for the graduation season. Be sure to ask what the requirements are.

### **Be flexible on delivery dates.**

Rental companies scramble to deliver items in time for graduation parties. With a majority of parties on the weekend of the official graduation ceremony it is not physically possible to deliver everything to everyone at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday! Being willing to accept delivery a day or two early will go a long way in helping the company schedule deliveries so all customers are satisfied.

### **Decisions that need to be made early**

---

- **Day and time of the open house.** As stated earlier, the majority of open houses are on the weekend of the official ceremony. The work and travel schedules of relatives and other guests often make it the only practical date. But if you can schedule a date on another weekend, it will definitely make obtaining the rental items you need easier. It also has the added benefit of relieving the pressure on your guests to attend every open house all in the same day.
- **Location.** June is smack in the middle of the peak wedding season so if your decision is to use a church or rental hall, reserve as early as absolutely possible – *a year in advance is not too soon!* If your celebration is planned for outdoors at your home, give serious consideration to renting a tent. Tents and canopies provide shade in good weather and protection in bad.

- **Catering vs. Home Cooked Food.** Weigh carefully the time, work and storage requirements of doing your own food preparation. Having your open house catered by a professional may sound like an expensive extravagance but it relieves you of an enormous amount of stress and hassle in the purchase, preparation, storage and serving of food. Further, hiring a caterer makes it possible to enjoy, *stress free*, the day of the celebration of your child's accomplishment. And, hey, they take the dirty dishes with them when they leave! Some caterer's do "drop-offs" – that is, they deliver the prepared food for you to dish up and serve. Interview and hire your caterer as early as possible – remember, it's wedding season for them too!

## **Items you might need to rent**

### **The Basics**

---

- **Tables.**
  - 8 ft. long banquet style. Seats 8 comfortably.
  - 5 ft. dia. round tables. Seats 8 comfortably.
  - Cocktail style. Four to five people can stand comfortably around. Very good for situations where people come and go frequently.
- **Chairs.**  
Most rental companies have two or more quality levels.
  - You can expect chairs that rent for around \$1.00 each to be slightly to significantly poorer in appearance. Ask to see a typical example so you can judge for yourself if the appearance factor is worth saving some money.
  - Chairs that rent for around \$2.00 will be excellent in appearance but still in the metal/poly folding chair category.
  - Chairs renting for between \$3.00 and \$8.00 are usually the best looking traditional styled painted wooden folding chairs although many are made of synthetic materials now.
  - High styled chairs with a more formal look rent for significantly more and most companies require more lead-time for these type of chairs.
- **Tablecloths and Napkins.** The rental cost of real linen tablecloths and napkins is not that much greater than quality disposable items and lends a real sense of quality to the event. If you have hired a caterer, their fee may include these items – be sure to ask.
- **Table Skirting.** Makes a neat look for your food and cake tables. Skirting wraps around the table and hangs to the floor hiding unsightly table legs and also allows you to store items under the table out of sight of your guests. Works great for your child's "bragging table."
- **Tents or Canopies.** See our website for space requirements for guest numbers. Download our free tent site inspection guide to see if you have the necessary clearances for a tent.

### **Food Preparation and Serving**

---

- **Portable Roasters.** Not just for Thanksgiving, these provide lots of extra cooking capacity and may be useful as serving items.

- **Hot Boxes.** Portable insulated food storage boxes keep your food warm or cold while waiting to be served. Stackable, they don't take up much room and are suitable for chafing pans.
- **Chafing Dishes.** Available in 4, 6 or 8-quart capacities, these provide inexpensive elegance to your food tables. The covers keep the bugs out and the flame keeps things warm. We include chafer fuel with our rentals – ask if the chafer fuel is an added cost.
- **Cold Trays.** Similar to the salad bars you see in restaurants without the “sneeze guards”, you load them up with ice and place your cold food bowls in them. This is a “must” for mayonnaise based foods (like potato salad) that spoil easily. Ours come with bowls and tongs included – be sure to ask what's included from your rental company.
- **Serving Utensils.** Why buy large serving spoons that you will only use once? You could borrow a bunch of mismatched spoons but renting matching serving utensils is an inexpensive way to add a classy touch to your food table.
- **Dinnerware.**
  - Glass or china plates and saucers, real silverware and drink glasses make a definite statement. Once again, if you have hired a caterer, their fee may include this – be sure to ask.
  - Upscale plastic is available for a surprisingly modest cost. It looks like real dinnerware but is completely recyclable or disposable.
  - Paper and foam plates are the most economical but also the most ordinary. We don't recommend paper for the simple reason it becomes soggy quickly and collapses under the weight of food. Having your guests end up “wearing” your food is not something any host wants!

## **Beverage Service**

---

- **Ice Chest.** Store your backup foods and beverages in a 120-quart cooler and keep them cold for ready use.
- **Cold Drink Ice Chest.** When your guests will be serving themselves bottled drinks, a nicer looking ice chest on a stand makes perfect sense. These are stainless steel and wrought iron with a clean elegant look.
- **Portable Bar.** This sits on a banquet table and is used when a bartender is serving cold drinks to your guests. Sometimes these are called “risers.” Many of these are made of plywood – you might want to take a look at it. Ours has an oak trimmed “marble look” top and skirting all the way around providing a classy look.
- **Keg Cooler.** This is a nicer looking way to keep “adult carbonated beverages” cool. It can also double as a self-serve bottled drink cooler.

Our website at <http://www.wmeo.net> contains a complete listing of our rental inventory along with pictures and prices. Use the next sheet to write your own estimate.

## Graduation Open House Planning Sheet

Date of Open House \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Qty	Equipment	Style	Price each	Cost
	Tables			
	Chairs			
	Tablecloths			
	Table skirts			
	Napkins			
	Plates			
	Bowls			
	Drink ware			
	Knives, forks and spoons			
	Chafing Dishes			
	Cold Tray (must be placed on table)			
	Serving Utensils			
	Beverage Cooler/Dispenser			
<b>Miscellaneous Items</b>				
Delivery and Pick up				
Sub Total				
Sales Tax (6%)				
Grand Total				