



## **Food and Beverage: The Secret Ingredients to a Stand-Out Event**

### **Association Insights**

**March 14, 2017**

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Of the many ingredients that create a memorable event, few are as influential as a venue's food and beverage services.

"Whether it's an awards dinner, a meal for an important meeting, or a lunch between sessions, the food we serve during events is often what brings people together, and it's usually one of the things guests talk about most when they return home," agrees Carrie Paolone, Director of Events with Niagara Fall's Scotiabank Convention Centre (SCCN).

Providing fresh and fulfilling meals throughout an event can go a long way towards leaving guests with a positive aftertaste. Moreover, says James Price, SCCN's Executive Chef, high-quality snacks and meals can set the tone for the day's activities: "Good food generates good feelings and can naturally make you happy, while sub-par food gets people talking and sets them in a negative frame of mind."

"At the end of the day, leaving our guests with a positive experience for every event is the driving force behind what our food and beverage department does," he adds.

Price is no stranger to challenges of feeding a crowd. With over 20-plus years of experience in kitchens around the world, and 4 years within SCCN's food and beverage (F&B) department, he's developed a talent for feeding crowds of many sizes. And like everything else in event planning, the key is knowing the client: "Every group is unique, so I love the opportunity to speak with guests to get a sense of their event and discuss various culinary trends they would like to experience. That helps us to exceed our guest's expectation by tailoring menus to their needs and wants."

As for special requests, he adds, “I don’t believe there is such a thing. Doing large scale groups for as long we have, we’ve seen almost every type of request you could imagine, and are always happy to accommodate.”

Indeed, planning an event’s menu and catering requirements relies on in-depth consultations with meeting planners to better understand their guests’ preferences. Says Paolone, even the type of company planning an event needs to be taken into consideration: “We had Arbonne in last year, which is a company that places a large focus on healthy living, vegan foods, and environmental awareness. We had to take this into consideration when planning their meals by sourcing local ingredients and creating custom choices to meet their needs.”

Today’s F&B departments are also seeking more sustainable food sources and eco-friendly operations. For SCCN, that means working with suppliers that only provide locally-sourced ingredients or take part in sustainable practices. It also means hand-selecting ingredients and taking the time to make meals from scratch.

“It’s important for us to be an ethical kitchen,” says Price. “We believe strongly in doing as much in-house and from scratch; we make the effort to butcher all our own proteins, make all of our soups and sauces in-house, or even jamming local berries.”

Serving fresh, delicious, and locally-sourced food to hungry groups is no small task in any kitchen, let alone a convention centre. Nevertheless, notes, Paolone, the critical ingredient to a successful F&B department is the same for any other: “It’s all about communication. The more clients can tell us about their event and what they are hoping to accomplish, the better we can plan to ensure their event is a success. And then, when they give us the opportunity to be creative, that helps us create something memorable in return.”

**Carrie Paolone and James Price are with Scotiabank Convention Centre. For more, visit [www.fallsconventions.com](http://www.fallsconventions.com).**

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