

Keep drinkers happy and safe at your simcha

By JOSH SAYLES
Jewish News of Greater Phoenix

I know how to work a room. I spent a lot of time in college tending bar, usually for catering companies, and the parties I've seen run the gamut - weddings, b'nai mitzvahs, 50th anniversaries, corporate events, you name it.

I have tons of stories, like the one about the crazy drunk uncle who had one too many and decided to hit the dance floor a little too hard or the 15-year-old who stole a bottle

of rum off my bar when I wasn't looking.

Thing is, I've spent countless hours at these parties, but always as a worker bee. I showed up, set up my bar, poured some drinks, packed up and left. It took me quite some time to learn what is involved in planning and operating a well-stocked bar at a party. And because it's been a few years since I've tended bar, I thought it would be wise to ask some experts to fill me in on what I've long forgotten,

or never actually knew in the first place.

Amy Petrovsky, president of Sensational Events, an event-coordinating company, and Dave Foreman, president and CEO of Pour Masters, a company that provides alcohol-certified bartenders and wait staff, offered these tips and tricks.

Their recommendations:

- *Bar basics*

Build your bar on six different types of alcohol: vodka, gin, rum, tequila, whiskey and scotch, says Foreman. Of course, there's got to be orange juice, cranberry juice, grapefruit juice, beer, wine, water and soda, too. Other alcohols can be included, such as vermouth for martinis or triple sec for margaritas, but he says clients often choose not to include the additional liquor.

"A lot of times (clients) don't do vermouth for martinis at a basic bar because if you do, you need martini glasses, and then the cost structure for the bar changes," Foreman says.

"You have to know what your clients' and guests' preferences are," says Petrovsky. "If you know they're wine drinkers then you make sure you do a wine tasting prior to the



BAR TIPS

event. ... If they're Patrín drinkers, you better have Patrín. They're not going to settle for another tequila."

- *Quantity, quantity, quantity.* Petrovsky says at an average party, guests average about three drinks over the course of the night, but she recommends buying more alcohol than you think is needed.

"There's a lot of people who say, 'Oh, we'll just get a little of this, we'll get a little of that,' and you really can't," she says. "If your guests drink more vodka and less tequila, you're going to (run out). Are you going to do a bar run in the middle of your party? It's better to buy more than less, always."

- *What if I'm on a budget?*

"For people with budget constraints, we usually suggest just doing beer and wine, and maybe margaritas if they want," says Foreman. "Everybody will drink beer and wine, and if you don't, there's always water and soda."

While Petrovsky acknowledges a beer and wine bar as an option, she says you can get away with even less than that. "If it's a wedding, you can probably do just the champagne toast. You don't have to serve alcohol the whole time. You can do sangria. You can do a mimosa. You can get away with doing a very light drink, and serving it for a short time."

(The choice of facility for your event also will affect the cost of the liquor. Hotels, for instance, usually have a per person per hour charge for the bar, while rental facilities such as a synagogue usually allow you to bring in your own liquor and hire qualified bartenders to tend bar.)

- *Open bar or cash bar?*

"A cash bar is usually for a corporate event or an event where you're trying to raise funds," says Petrovsky. "I (cater) a lot of charity events and they're usually cash bars. That's highly appropriate. There's no reason why the charity should have to spend money on alcohol when they're trying to raise money for their cause. For private events, I would encourage the client to do an (open) bar, whether it's a full bar or a (beer and) wine bar."

- *What if I have a daytime reception instead of an evening one?*

Certain drinks are served at daytime parties, such as bloody marys and mimosas, that aren't typically seen at night, according to Foreman.

Petrovsky says that less alcohol is consumed during the day as well, but that there has been a trend toward less alcohol consumption at all parties over the last several years.

And with stricter DUI laws, everybody is much more conscientious of how much they drink, she says.

- *Tipping the staff*

Different catering companies have different policies for tipping the bartender. Petrovsky doesn't allow for a tip jar at private functions with open bars, but says it's fair game at cash bars. Foreman leaves the decision up to the clients—they can allow the bartender to have a tip jar, leave a gratuity for the staff at the end of the night or deliver a check to the catering office a few days later.

For clients who choose not to permit a tip jar, Foreman says \$1 per guest is an adequate tip.

- *Be safe*

It goes without saying not to let anyone drive drunk. But being safe goes well beyond taking Uncle Maury's keys when he's had a drink or three over the legal limit.

Although the amount of you or your bartender's liability varies from state to state, it is important the bartending service you employ has liquor liability insurance.

The bartenders employed by that bartending service also should be certified in alcohol training by the state. State-certified bartenders know tips and tricks for countering potentially combative situations, such as cutting a person off at a private party, Foreman says.

If you're worried your guests will overindulge, consider renting a bus to transport them to and from the hotel. There are side benefits as well to that option. You won't have to be concerned guests will get lost or show up late to the event.

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