

# Think of your next party as a 'Bright Happening'

## Justus woman's business creates one-of-a-kind experiences for party-goers

By Robert Curran

After working for non-profit organizations for several years where she planned and carried out fund raising and other events, Beverly Bright decided it was time to go into business for herself.

The result was Bright Happenings Event Planning, Justus, which went into operation in October of 2004 with a kick-off open house at the historic Tripp House in Scranton.

"I felt the work was something I could do and be comfortable in because of my experience with nonprofits," Bright said.

Like many others in the region who have opened their own small business, one of Bright's first stops was the University of Scranton's Small Business Development Center (SBDC) where advisors helped her form a business plan and execute it. This included marketing and other strategies.

Bright also attended seminars sponsored by the university and the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce and brainstormed with people who have small companies or people who might be potential clients.

She joined the Abington Business and Professional Association (ABPA) where she was active, and attended numerous networking events to get out the word about her new business. She realized, she said, that personal contact was a key to visibility.



Bright

From companies to couples, she got the word out.

"A company could have an anniversary coming up, and a couple could have an anniversary or a birthday," she said. "This is where I can help."

Last summer she was asked to do a "Summer Solstice" for family and friends of a couple.

What the party needed, she said, were activities for the children. She came up with sand arts and face painting with an instructor, and the children had their own little tents with tables and loved it.

But that wasn't all. "I had a tethered hot air balloon ride right on the grounds for all the guests," Bright said.

"There was a long line and it was great,

The oldest type of advertising, word of mouth, got her started with some clients, and the result was hard work and successful events.

with people waiting to go up. It went from 6 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. It was something to look for and it was something different."

That night, Bright said, she had a caterer who did the food and hors d'oeuvres, with a variety of food on the outside grill. Later, there was a full-course meal, including sundaes with topping, home-made cookies, along with a wine-tasting.

"Food is a big part of it," Bright said, adding that she had a program for the event, and a staffer who welcome everyone and gave them a name tag. The program listed events and what time each event would take place.

There was a jazz trio, and a photographer to take pictures of the festivities.

Bright had a staffer to park cars and be available when guests were leaving, and other staffers helped prepare food and coordinate activities, including the hot air balloon. Altogether, she said, there were more than 15 persons on the grounds to help put on the program.

"Everything went like clockwork," Bright said.

The photographer, she said, shot numerous pictures of the family and guests at different events because the client wanted to have everything put in a book for an album that was given to her.

Last year, Bright said, she did a "Kentucky Derby" party at a client's residence and suggested a poster be made of all past winners of the derby.

The poster was put on an easel and as guests came in they found it interesting looking at the poster, because the client hosts this party annually.

Bright said she made certain everything was coordinated. She had Kentucky Derby napkins for cocktails and dinner, and women were given roses. Bright said, in keeping with the theme, special sugar cookies were served, decorated with horses.

Bright planned the food the client wanted for the evening and she said the party was a success, with people enjoying themselves and watching the horse race.

She said her business has no demographic restrictions, with parties for all ages, including those who want a party for children.

If the event is planned for the outdoors and it rains, there are tents on the grounds for dinner as a backup site. Also, arrangements are made to have an event move inside in case of inclement weather.

For the popular hot air balloon, Bright said good weather is needed, with proper wind. Very windy weather, she said, is not a good condition for the balloon.

Bright said parties range in size, with 200 guests on the grounds for the Summer Solstice and a security officer she hired for the night.

At the Tripp House, there were 100 persons present for a fund-raiser that included music and food.

For a successful event, Bright said "planning is crucial."

For someone who wants to start a small business, Bright gave this advice:

"I would tell them to start at the University of Scranton and take some of the courses they have. Advisors will help them get started. A lot of it is being in the right place at the right time, and networking is very important."

Does she at times have to dissuade clients from an idea that doesn't work? She said one client didn't want music because of the possibility of bad weather. Bright said a tent would be the backup and the music would work well because of the rainy weather. With the tent as a backup, it worked out to be a successful event, Bright said, adding: "The client always has the final say. In this case, she was happy we had the music."

Whatever takes place can be a collaborative effort. Bright said some clients who come to her already have ideas about an event, and some come looking for ideas. In the latter case, Bright make recommendations.

As part of her business, Bright also finds antique dealers for clients who do antique appraisal shows. (Bright's Web site is [www.bright happenings.com](http://www.bright happenings.com))

### Small Business

## Tips and Tactics

*How to calculate whether your business will break even.*

Tips from the SBA,  
[www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov):

#### How to perform a break-even analysis

To perform a break-even analysis, you'll have to make educated guesses about your expenses and revenues. You should do some serious research - including an analysis of your market - to determine your projected sales volume and your anticipated expenses. Business plan books and software can teach you how to make reasonable revenue and cost estimates.

You'll need to make the following estimates and calculations:

■ **Fixed costs.** Fixed costs (sometimes called "overhead") don't vary much from month to month. They include rent, insur-

*Simply divide your estimated annual fixed costs by your gross profit percentage to determine the amount of sales revenue you'll need to bring in just to break even.*

ance, utilities, and other set expenses. It's also a good idea to throw a little extra, say 10 percent, into your break-even analysis to cover miscellaneous expenses that you can't predict.

■ **Sales revenue.** This is the total dollars from sales activity that you bring into your business each month or year. To perform a valid break-even analysis, you must base your forecast on the volume of business you really expect - not on how much you need to make a good profit.

■ **Average gross profit for each sale.** Average gross profit is the money left from each sales dollar after paying the direct costs of a sale. (Direct costs are what you pay to provide your product or service.) For example, if Antoinette pays an average of \$100 for goods to make dresses that she sells for an average of \$300, her average gross profit is \$200.

■ **Average gross profit percentage.** This percentage tells you how much of each dollar of

sales income is gross profit. To calculate your average gross profit percentage, divide your average gross profit figure by the average selling price. For example, if Antoinette makes an average gross profit of \$200 on dresses that she sells for an average of \$300, her gross profit percentage is 66.7 percent (\$200 divided by \$300).

#### Calculating Your Break-Even Point

Once you've calculated the numbers above, it's easy to figure out your break-even point. Simply divide your estimated annual fixed costs by your gross profit percentage to determine the amount of sales revenue you'll need to bring in just to break even. ☛

Source: [www.nolopress.com](http://www.nolopress.com)