

WINTER 2023

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Show Issue 2024!



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EDUCATION, NEWS, PRODUCTS & IDEAS FOR PROFESSIONAL CATERERS

Winter 2023 CONTRIBUTORS



Executive **Anthony Lambatos** explores how work environments can impact the industry



Chef **Robin Selden** sheds light on how to successfully run a family business



Sales expert **Meryl Snow** defines the key personality traits of sales professionals



Chef **Jeffrey Schlissel** discusses how mental health can impact your ROI

What do you think of this issue? Like it? Love it? Have something to contribute to our website? We'd love to hear from you. Write us at editor@catersource.com.

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All in the *Family*

When I joined my mom's catering company over 25 years ago, I never imagined we would be where we are today! Truthfully, from the beginning I used to joke that if we didn't fight and kill each other, we'd potentially have something pretty special.

Fast forward to today, and you'll not only find that my brother joined in, but that we have team members who have worked for us longer than I have and who knew me and Jeffrey when we were young kids. How special is that?! These people are as much family to us as our own blood relatives as we spend more time with them than we do our own families. Running a family business that was started over 40 years ago by my mother (who is still very involved) is a delicate dance between preserving tradition and embracing innovation. For our legacy clients, and for my mom, it's crucial to balance time-honored recipes and practices that they have grown accustomed to and giving a nod to what today's foodies are craving so that we remain current and on the cutting edge of creative culinary experience. It's important that we embrace the evolving tastes and expectations of modern consumers and the next generation of our clients. I'm going to delve into some strategies that Jeffrey, Marcia, and I are working through that have infused Marcia Selden Catering & Events with freshness, excitement, and contemporary appeal while also keeping the "name on the door" (in this case our mother, Marcia) happy and comfortable with the direction we are taking with her third child—the business itself.

I'll start by sharing our successful recipe for success, which is what we follow daily:

- Communicate
- Appreciate
- Trust
- Embrace strengths
- Respect

Communicate

Effective communication is the cornerstone of any successful family business. Clear and open communication is crucial among family members and the entire team. Regular meetings, both formal and informal, provide a platform for discussing ideas, challenges, and goals. Encourage active listening and constructive feedback to resolve issues and ensure everyone is on the same page. Trust me, this is not always the easiest thing, as the lines are blurred when working with family members and often feelings are hurt when someone takes things personally. We always must remember that this is business and not personal. Effective communication also extends to your customers—be responsive to their needs and feedback to build strong relationships.

Appreciate

Show appreciation for your family members and employees. Recognize and acknowledge their hard work, dedication, and contributions to

the business. Celebrate milestones and successes together, whether it's a long-term employee's anniversary or a well-executed catering event. We also celebrate birthdays and employee of the month, and when clients shout out an employee, we celebrate that too. These acts of appreciation go a long way when done in a genuine way. The family dynamic in our company stretches throughout our team.

A culture of appreciation boosts morale, motivates your team, and fosters a positive work environment. Who wouldn't want that?

Trust

Trust is the secret sauce and truly the foundation of what makes our family business run smoothly. You've got to trust in each other's skills, dedication, and choices. Skip the micromanaging—let your family and team own their tasks. Each person, whether they are family or not, needs to stay in their lanes and do what they do best. As we always say, it takes a village to accomplish what we do, and each person is integral in making the magic happen. Trusting each other's decisions builds confidence and gives everyone the power to rock their roles. Plus, it sets a great example for building trust with your customers, and that's a big deal in the catering world.

Embrace strengths

Speaking of staying in your lane; let's talk about playing to your strengths here. Every family member and team member brings unique strengths to the table. Identify and leverage these strengths to enhance the overall business. If one family member is



“Running a family catering business in today's ever-changing market is all about finding that sweet spot between sticking to tradition and embracing innovation.”

excellent at culinary creativity (that would be me), while another excels in business management (and that would be Jeffrey), allocate roles accordingly. Encourage professional development to further enhance individual strengths. Education is huge and that is why we invest in learning from the best in the business at conferences

like *Catersource + The Special Event*. We are uber-focused on everyone's growth—help each other and your team to get even better at what they're already great at. By embracing and making the most of each person's talents, you'll create a well-rounded and capable team.

Respect

Respect is non-negotiable in a family business. Treat each family member, employee, and customer with respect and courtesy. Cultivate a culture of respect by valuing diverse perspectives and opinions *and* listening to them all. Ensure that disputes are resolved respectfully and professionally.

By following these “CATER” principles—communicate effectively, appreciate your team, trust each other, embrace individual strengths, and always show respect—you can nurture a thriving family business that combines tradition with innovation, remains adaptable to changing customer preferences, and fosters a supportive and harmonious work environment.

Where tradition meets innovation

With Marcia at the helm, it's important that we focus on preserving tradition. Our business is deeply rooted in traditions that contribute to our uniqueness and charm. Recipes handed down through generations of our family as well as signature dishes that my mom has been making for decades have become the hallmark of the business. Having said that, we take those special heirloom recipes and turn them upside down, adding a more modern approach to each item while holding onto the integrity of each dish. Maintaining these elements helps to create a consistent experience and cultivates a loyal customer base that values nostalgia and familiarity, but also appreciates how we are changing with the times.

While tradition is important, our company has been growing fast,

See Robin Selden LIVE!

You can see **Robin Selden** live and in-person at Catersource + The Special Event, February 12-15 in Austin, TX during the following sessions:

- **Feasts & Fetes: A Savvy Guide to Mastering Corporate Event Planning & Catering Collaborations**
- **Sip, Savor, and Slice: Crafting Unforgettable Tastings for Wedding Catering**
- **DICED Competition**

Visit <https://informaconnect.com/catersource-thespecialevent/> for all the details.

and we've embraced and adapted innovation into our business. As I've said before, we must adapt to the changing preferences of today's consumers to stay current and grow. This involves infusing innovative ideas into every aspect of the business. This goes from menu design to customer engagement: integrating new technologies, experimenting with cool new ingredients and equipment, and offering creative presentation styles that have elevated our brand in so many ways and captured the attention of a broader audience.

As younger family members step into leadership roles, their unique perspectives can reshape the business. When I began working with my mom, she was still handwriting all her client proposals, which were gorgeous to receive, but the time involved in that customization was insane. Our compromise is now to send handwritten notes to all clients after their events, which really is a special touch. The next generation expects a business that is not only financially successful but also socially and environmentally responsible. They bring fresh ideas, tech-savviness, and a keen awareness of current trends which we embrace. Concepts such as sustainable sourcing, reduced food waste, and ethical practices resonate deeply with modern consumers and can be key drivers of success. Thankfully that has always been a focus of ours since the business began, as Marcia always says: "We need to take care of the earth for the future generations." Essentially, she's

always thinking of her grandchildren and their kids.

Some of the strategies that are dear to my heart are making sure to keep the essence of our family recipes but constantly experimenting and doing research and development to create new items both on the culinary side as well as in our liquid kitchen and for our vegan brand, Naked Fig Catering. Our end goal is to come up with offerings that are creative, beautiful to look at, and obviously delicious, as well as interactive and experiential. This keeps us current and modern.

It's also very important to me that we continue to establish a strong online presence through our social media platforms. We need to have a user-friendly website and put out engaging content to help attract younger clients. Sharing behind-the-scenes glimpses, cooking tutorials, and client testimonials can build a sense of community as well as show that we are growing with the times.

Running a family catering business in today's ever-changing market is all about finding that sweet spot between sticking to tradition and embracing innovation. The next generation brings their own ideas and expectations into the mix, and it's a big part of moving your company forward while keeping things fresh. By mixing our family's time-honored values with some modern strategies, your catering company can keep team members and customers happy, attract new ones, and chart a successful course into the future, building a legacy. 



Robin Selden is the Managing Partner & Executive Chef of Marcia Selden Catering & Events and Naked Fig Catering, where she oversees the culinary and marketing operations for her family's multimillion-dollar company. In October 2019, Robin was honored to be named to the BizBash1000 celebrating the top 1,000 event professionals in the USA in 2019 and to the BizBash 500 celebrating the top 500 event professionals in 2020 in the United States. Selden is in the President's Council as a past President of the International Caterers Association and won their Chef of the Year award. She's a past Innovative Chef of the Year and a current Ambassador Chef for the Greenwich Wine & Food Festival.

AND THE NOMINEES ARE...

Let's give a round of applause to this year's ACE Award nominees!

by Amber Kispert

Catersource magazine is delighted to announce the nominees for the 2024 ACE Awards, which will be bestowed during *Catersource* + The Special Event on February 15th in Austin, TX. *Special Events* magazine will also be handing out its Gala Awards. Turn to page 34 in the magazine for this year's nominees.

Without any further ado, please congratulate your 2024 ACE Awards nominees!

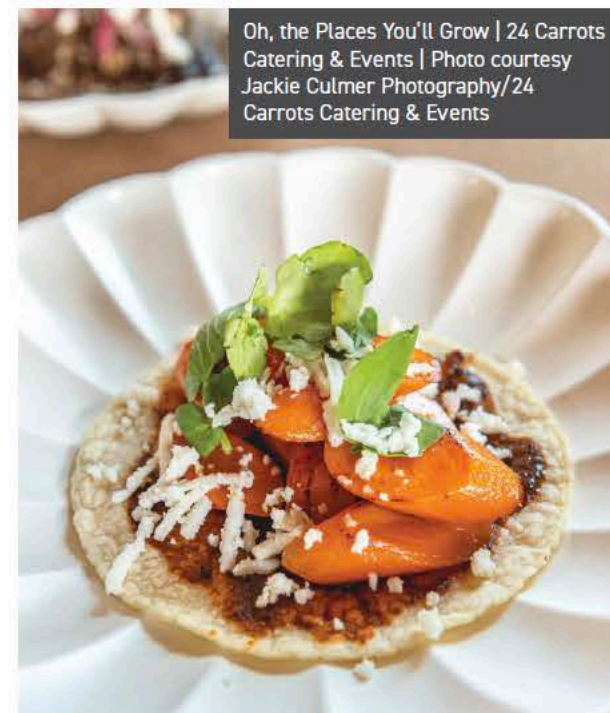
ACE
Achievement in Catered Events

BEST OFF-PREMISE CATERING FOR COMPANIES ABOVE \$2 MILLION ANNUAL REVENUE

Food for Thought | 24 Carrots Catering & Events | Photo courtesy Lorely Meza/24 Carrots Catering & Events



Oh, the Places You'll Grow | 24 Carrots Catering & Events | Photo courtesy Jackie Culmer Photography/24 Carrots Catering & Events



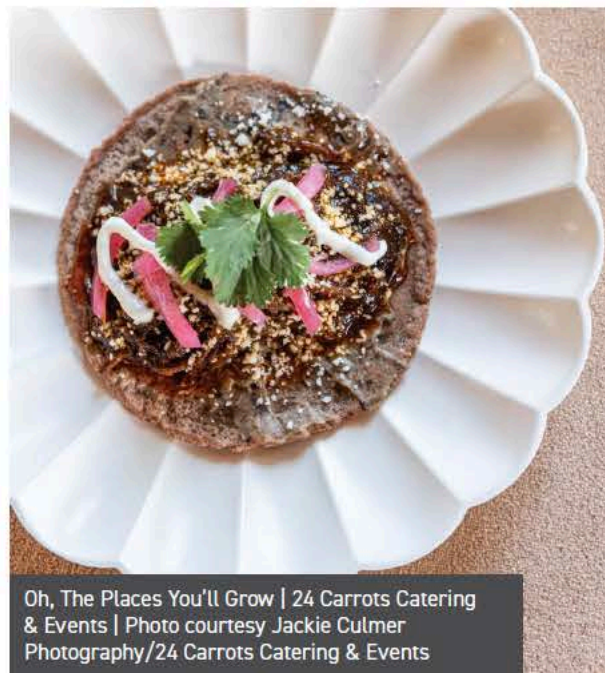
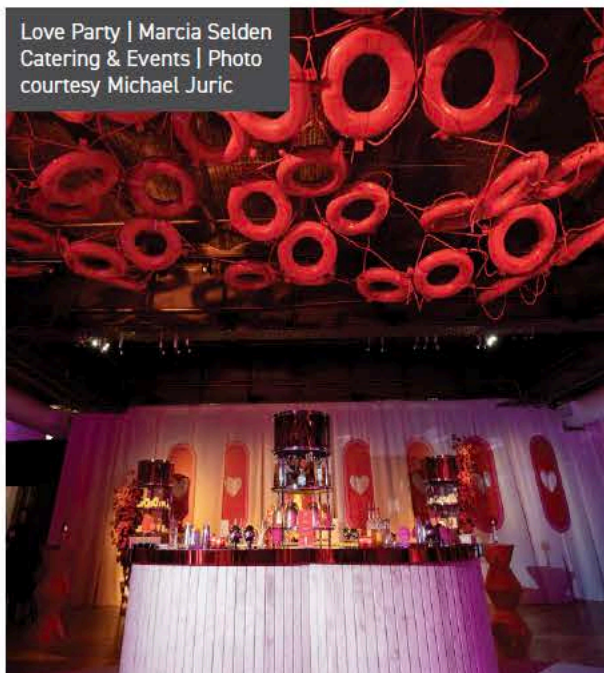
War Eagle! | Proof of the Pudding | Photo courtesy Eric & Jamie Photography

CATERED SOCIAL EVENT OF THE YEAR

Bubbles on the Beach |
Sugar Beach Events | Photo
courtesy MeewMeew Studios



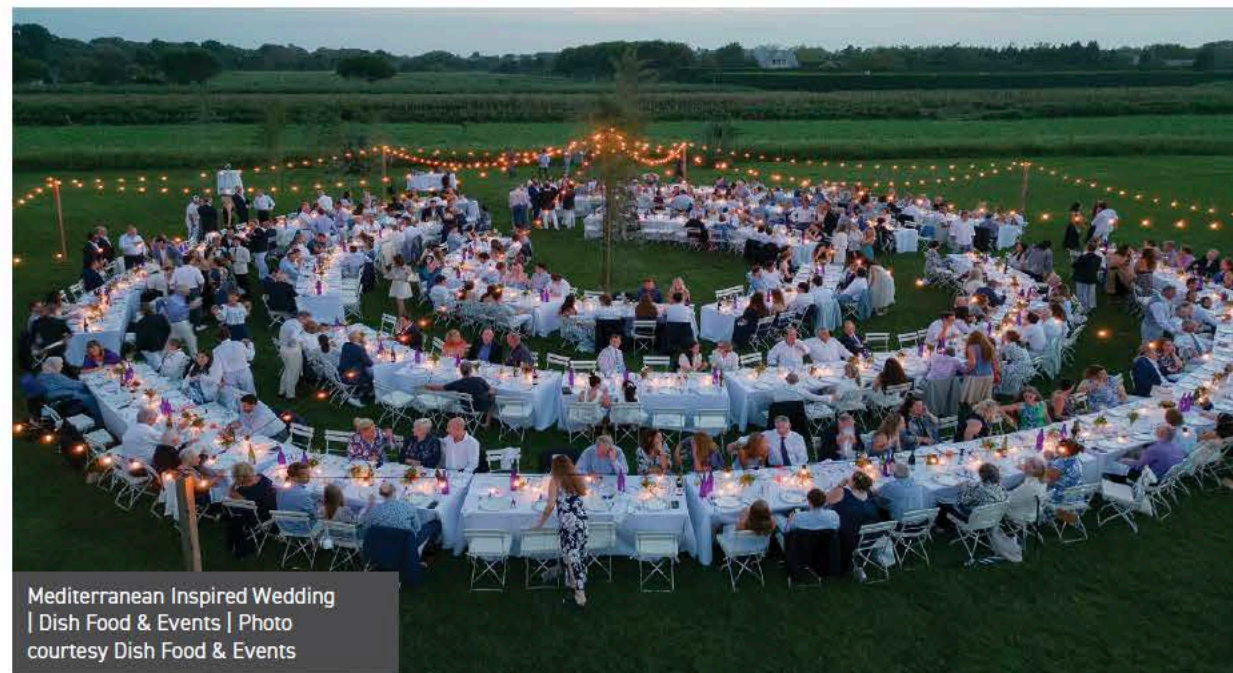
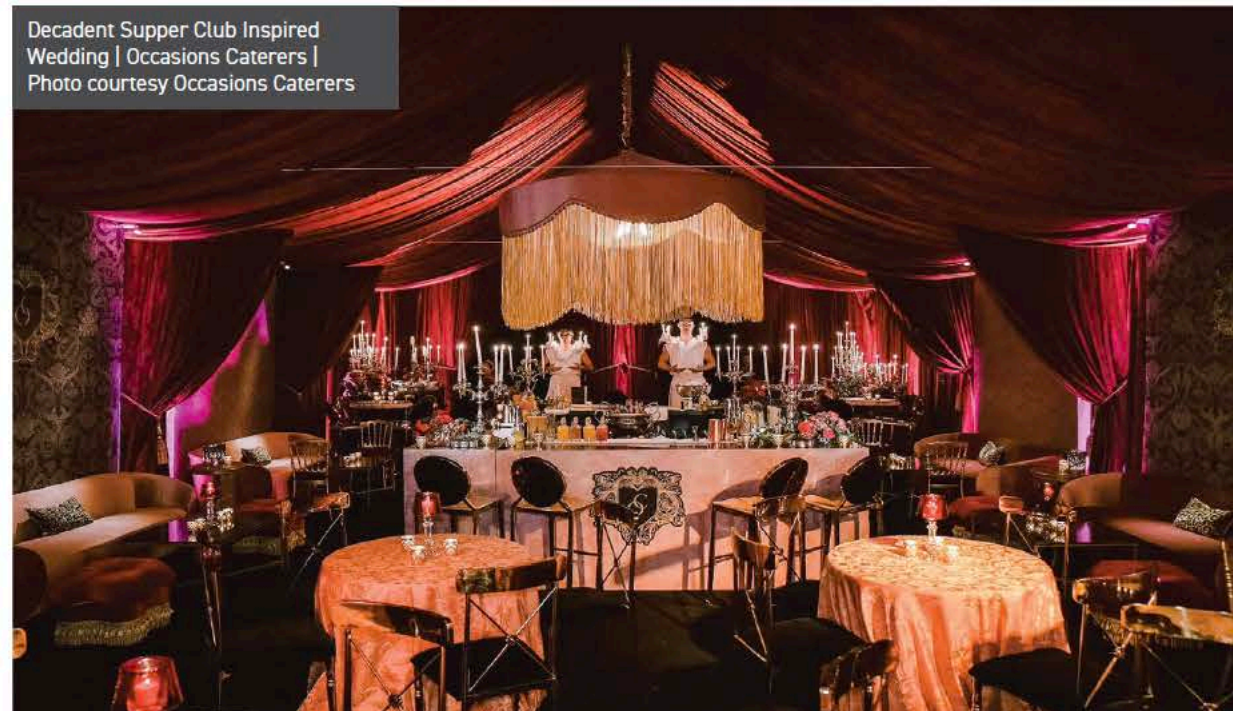
Love Party | Marcia Selden
Catering & Events | Photo
courtesy Michael Juric



Oh, The Places You'll Grow | 24 Carrots Catering
& Events | Photo courtesy Jackie Culmer
Photography/24 Carrots Catering & Events

CATERED WEDDING OF THE YEAR

Decadent Supper Club Inspired
Wedding | Occasions Caterers |
Photo courtesy Occasions Caterers



Mediterranean Inspired Wedding
| Dish Food & Events | Photo
courtesy Dish Food & Events

Catersource State of the Industry 2023

Get industry insight from these experts during Catersource + The Special Event, February 12-15 in Austin, TX.

Paul Buchanan

Sebastien Centner

Clint Elkins

Anthony Lambatos

Roy Porter

Meryl Snow

Caterers grappled with rising costs & decreasing budgets, while creativity remained top of mind. By Amber Kispert

It's been quite a roller coaster for the catering and events industry thanks to lingering effects from the pandemic followed by substantial growth during recovery, forcing everyone to embrace a new normal. Fluctuating prices, technological advancements, staffing shortages, and changing consumer behaviors are just a few factors that forced the catering and events industry to adapt.

As 2023 comes to a close, the catering industry finds itself at the intersection of tradition and innovation, so let's take a look back at a year that challenged caterers to tap into their most creative solutions.

"Remember, it's not what happened," says Roy Porter (Engage Works), "it's how you react to what happened. Your positive attitude will help you react in a positive way and find the underlying opportunities."

Survey says

Earlier in the third quarter, *Catersource* released a survey to our readership. Surveys are always a good place to start an end of the year report. Let's first look at some of the questions we asked, and some of the interesting responses we received, and then we will move into the *Catersource* State of the Industry 2023.

Who responded to our survey?

- 35% identified as Owner/CEO
- 23% as Director/VP
- 17% as Event Planning & Staff
- 16% Sales/Marketing

Interestingly, 25% noted that they have been in the events industry for 10–14 years, 18% have been in the industry for 15–20 years, and an

impressive 44% have worked in the industry for more than 20 years.

This year's survey looked at everything from staffing to client spend to guest counts to client requests. Take a look at the accompanying data to hear from your peers on what they encountered this year.



Top Trends of 2023

We asked, you answered! Here are the top trends that took the spotlight throughout 2023 according to the *Catersource* State of the Industry survey.

- Interactive food stations
- Small bites
- Health and wellness
- Outdoor events
- Vegan and vegetarian
- Allergy conscious menus
- Comfort food with a twist
- Build-your-own bars
- Family-style service
- Grazing tables
- Fusion/global influences
- Customization
- Farm to table
- Extravagant florals
- Signature cocktails
- Dessert stations
- Personalized décor
- Late night snacks
- Experiential
- Themes
- Casual with a formal flair

Corporate catering makes a comeback

From the nuances of business events to the tailored experiences demanded by corporate clients, 2023 proved to be an interesting one for the corporate catering industry. According to *Catersource's* 2023 State of the Industry (SOI) survey, just 30% of respondents indicated that the corporate catering market is strong, whereas 47% said they still see the market segment as still improving. However, 35% of respondents did indicate that they generated the most business in 2023 from corporate catering. According to data from *Datassential*, 41% of restaurants offer catering in some capacity, resulting in catering being the most offered service by restaurants.

The advent of remote and hybrid work models has profoundly impacted corporate catering. In 2023, caterers have had to meet the demands of virtual events, creating innovative solutions for delivering culinary experiences to dispersed teams. Virtual tasting sessions, curated meal kits, and technology-driven catering services have become essential offerings as corporate clients seek ways to foster team engagement and connection in a digital workspace.

In its annual *Lunch Report*, ezCater surveyed 5,000 workers across the U.S. to explore the relationship between food at work—specifically around lunchtime habits. At a high level, findings show that providing a catered lunch is a win-win-win for companies, employees, and restaurants.

- Lunch breaks benefit both workers and employers, showing the value of workplace catering for restaurants. Most (78%) workers agree on one thing year after year: taking a lunch break improves

their job performance, with over half (53%) saying they have more mental clarity when they stop for lunch.

- In addition to increased productivity, 67% of hybrid workers say free lunch would impact their decision to work onsite and commute.
- Workers in Atlanta were the most likely to say their employer pays for lunch at least once a week (44% vs 31% nationally)

Additionally, consider these statistics from the *Catersource* survey:

- Lunch is the most prevalent mealtime in corporate catering (53%)
- Full-service catering is the most prevalent type of corporate catering (47%)

Corporate catering in 2023 is not just about feeding employees either; it's about nourishing their well-being. The trend toward healthier, plant-based options and customizable menus that cater to diverse dietary needs has gained momentum. In 2024, expect corporate caterers to delve deeper into wellness-oriented menus, integrating nutritional expertise into their offerings to align with the growing emphasis on employee health and vitality.

According to ezCater, some ideas to capitalize on the current trends in corporate catering include:

- Creating menus to target:
 - *Bleisure* travelers who want a meal with friends and family in a hotel
 - Remote workers who come together for meetings and teamwork
- As the remote work trend continues, coworking can create opportunities too; these rented out spaces also fuel catering sales

- Creating unique dining experiences for affluent customers, e.g., a seasonable menu with extraordinary ingredients
- Blending entertainment and dining experiences for customers, e.g., a themed menu

Making a moment

If 2022 was the year for getting back to pre-pandemic event levels, then 2023 has been the year for getting reinspired. Catered events were no longer just about great food, but an experience as well.

Throughout 2023, caterers have been exploring customization, personalization, and interactive dining concepts to captivate the taste buds of their clients. Personalized menus tailored to dietary preferences and cultural considerations have become a hallmark of successful catered social events, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity and customer satisfaction.

Immersive experiences

In the realm of event catering, a transformation is unfolding—a shift from traditional behind-the-scenes kitchen work to immersive and engaging dining experiences.

Immersive experiences are not necessarily new, but according to *SupHerb Farms' 2024 Food & Beverage Trend Report*, there is a new breadth of experiences now available to consumers, as well as the venues in which these experiences can be found.

(From top) Apple-Y Ever After Market Salad (shaved brussels sprouts, candied walnuts, Granny Smith apples, currants, pecorino, and red wine vinaigrette), elote-style mini street corns, and the beverage stand featuring several specialty cocktails and non-alcoholic beverages during 24 Carrots Catering & Events' Autumn's Up Fall Festival ACE-winning corporate event. Photos courtesy Andy Rodriguez





Star Trax Events designed a custom bar, which served specialty Detroit cocktails, for the 2022 North American International Auto Show. Photo courtesy Star Trax Events



Star Trax Events hosted the Allure - Corporate Charity Preview Event as part of the 2022 North American International Auto Show. Photo courtesy Star Trax Events



Contemporary Catering wanted to ditch the "boring" plated salads for its CATIE-nominated event. After some brainstorming, they took the traditional "champagne wall" concept and applied it to tasty, fresh salads! Photo courtesy International Caterers Association/Contemporary Catering



During the CATIE-winning La Caille Tasting, LUX Catering & Events designed a culinary experience to ignite varied senses—olfactory, visual, touch, and taste. Photo courtesy Billow & Mull



RED VELVET hosted the Gala-nominated Jimmy John's Château JéJé corporate event. Photo courtesy Holly Cowart



Custom sandwiches from Jimmy John's were delivered to guests fine dining style during the Château JéJé event. Photo courtesy Holly Cowart

At-table preparation, interactive dishes/beverages, or items that require some prep can help create mini-immersions for consumers.

"Weddings are becoming more experiential as couples want to get their loved ones involved in their big day," says Hannah Friedenbach (Culinary Canvas).

"Clients are seeking a new, different, and unique experience," adds Porter. "Give it to them because they will pay more for it!"

Eventbrite found that 75% of diners believe it's worth paying more for a one-of-a-kind experience.

Experiential catering is the natural progression of the open kitchen concept. Think back to those classic omelet and carving stations; they've been a staple in catering for years. However, today's guests seek more than just a meal; they desire an active role in their culinary journey.

The rise of social media and a desire for shareable, engaging experiences to share with their followers has shifted expectations and made interactive catering stations an ever-more attractive event integration.

"Immersive catering means crafting experiences that go beyond presenting to or at a guest, but rather actively inviting the guest to become a participant in that experience," according to an article from Schaffer. "It's no longer simply about serving food; it's about creating unforgettable moments. These experiences engage the senses, spark conversations, and leave lasting impressions."

Taking the immersive concept even further is sensory dining, where guests use all their senses to enjoy a meal: smell, sight, touch, sound, and of course taste.

Details matter

In 2023, and moving into 2024, caterers are placing heightened importance on the aesthetics of their culinary creations. From meticulously arranged platters to avant-garde serving vessels, the visual appeal of food is a powerful tool for creating a lasting impression. Instagram-worthy moments are not just a trend; they are an integral part of modern catering.

"We've made cakes with hyper-personal touches like a topper welded by the groom or decorating end-of-the-night cookies with the bride and groom's silhouettes," says Laurie Lewis (Culinary Canvas).

Next up, vague menu descriptors are in the past as more transparent listings become en vogue, according to Technomic. Cocktails won't contain just any apple flavor, but rather that of a Granny Smith apple.



Fried white and green asparagus with a truffle fig aioli served during LUX Catering & Events' CATIE-winning La Caille Tasting. Photo courtesy International Caterers Association/LUX Catering & Events



Marcia Selden Catering & Events' Boursin Panna Cotta with Sunchoke Bisque and Crispy Garlic Chips. The soup is poured tableside, which makes for a beautiful presentation. Photo courtesy Julie Bidwell



Schaffer's Edible Garden: bite-sized crudite plated in edible soil made from puffed rice and breadcrumbs, and accompanied by watering cans filled with dressing. Photo courtesy Lex Gallegos



Guests opened these white boxes to reveal a smiling message and the CATIE-nominated torched avocado toast with blue crab salad, lemon ricotta, and colorful edible flowers from Footers Catering. Photo courtesy International Caterers Association/Footers Catering

Generic red wine vinegar will move aside for Barolo wine vinegar. And raw beef dishes will become more distinct as filet mignon carpaccio and tenderloin steak tartare. Not only will ingredient varietal types find momentum in menu descriptions, but so will callouts of regions or countries of origin and influence, especially lesser-known ones, such as Haitian honey and Senegalese-style chicken. This in-depth menu detail will further push quality, premiumization, and transparency in the consumer mindset.

Additionally, the era of one-size-fits-all catering is fading. In 2024, successful caterers will go beyond crafting personalized menus; they will extend customization to every aspect of the dining experience. From tailored table settings that reflect the event theme to personalized service styles that resonate with the client's vision, attention to detail will

be a hallmark of bespoke catering services. Every element, from linens to lighting, will contribute to a cohesive and immersive experience.

"Think about going fully custom with your food and cocktails by implementing cocktails that pair with every part of the meal," says Friedenbach. "One drink introduces the appetizer, another pairs with the main entree, and a final glass pairs with desserts. You can even go the unexpected route and play with salty, spicy, and umami flavors with the evening's entree. Plus, guests might not always leave room for dessert while dancing the night away, but they'll sure be intrigued by a decadent dessert cocktail or boozy ice cream scoop."

The triple threat

Caterers are still having to find ways to adapt to the three-headed monster

that has plagued the industry for the past couple years: a tight labor market, a chaotic supply chain, and runaway inflation. According to a survey from the International Caterers Association, these challenges equate to a 75% decrease in business for Q1 year-over-year.

A tight labor market

The hospitality industry began 2023 with optimism, with the majority of people expecting revenue to rise by 10% or more, even as they increased pay to attract workers in a competitive market, according to Instawork's [State of Hospitality Staffing report](#).

However, despite consecutive employment growth for 24 months, the industry is still roughly 450,000 jobs below pre-pandemic levels, according to a white paper from SupHerb Farms, [Facing the Labor Dilemma](#).

Continued on page 111



Culinary Canvas has been utilizing native state flowers and wildflowers for cakes, while also exploring drying florals and using them for a pressed look. Shown: these flowers were handpicked from the groom's grandfather's garden. Photo courtesy Culinary Canvas



Culinary Canvas likes to add hyper-personalized touches to desserts, such as a cake topper welded by the groom. Photo courtesy Culinary Canvas

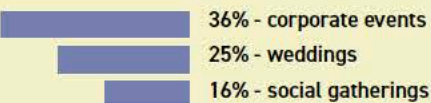


SURVEY SAYS

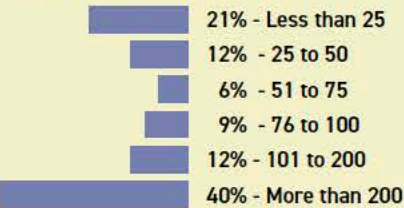
Which of the following best describes your company's primary business?



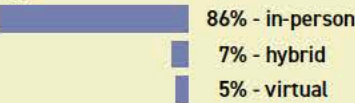
Which business sector have you garnered the most business from thus far in 2023?



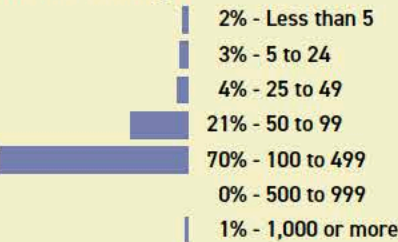
How many events of any kind have you been contracted for in 2023?



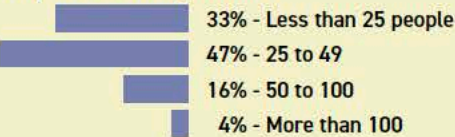
How often do you produce the following types of catered events?



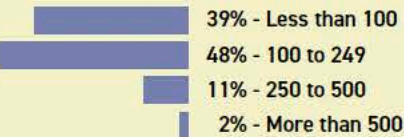
How many guests on average attend your clients' weddings?



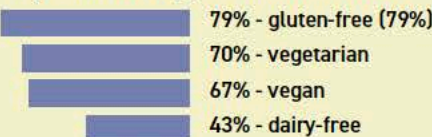
What is the average size of your drop-off corporate catering orders?



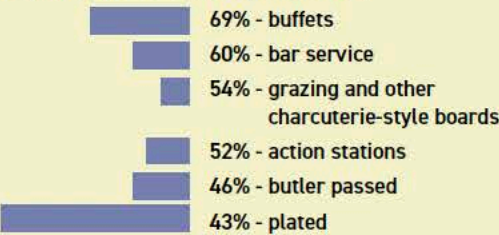
What is the average size of your full-service corporate catering orders?



What eating styles/diets have been most requested during your events in 2023?



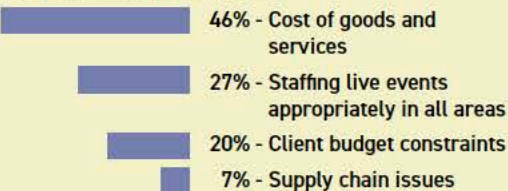
What catering styles or requests were highly requested throughout 2023?



What are the greatest professional challenges facing you in 2024?



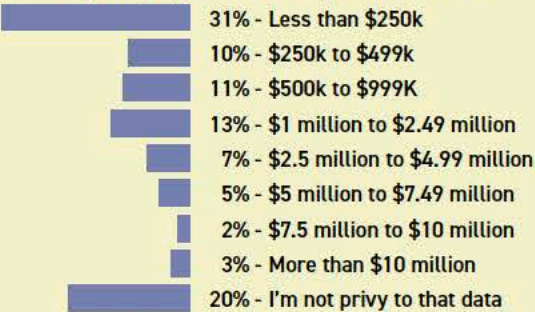
What has been the most concerning for your company in 2023?



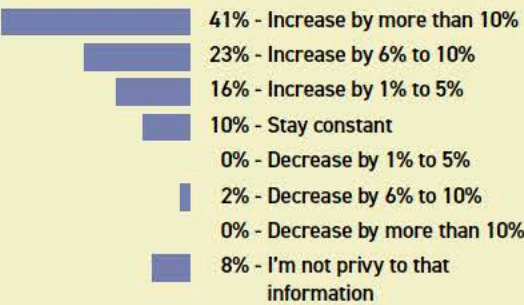
How does the 2023 projected profit compare to 2022?



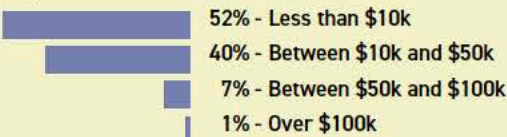
What is your projected overall profit for 2023?



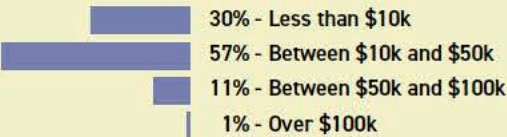
How do you expect your organization's 2024 expenditures to change compared with 2023?



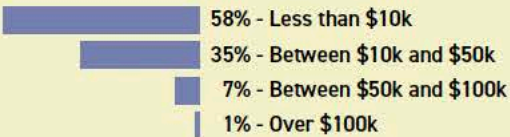
What is the average client spend for corporate events in 2023?



What has been the average client wedding budget in 2023?



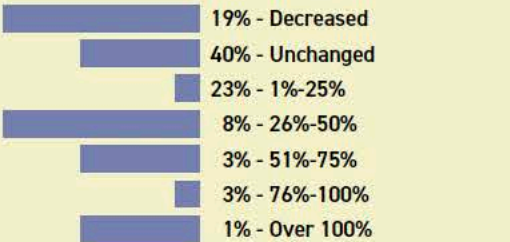
What is the average client spend for social events in 2023?



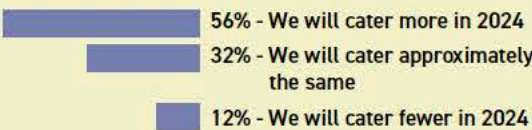
What is the approximate number of people employed by your company, across all locations?



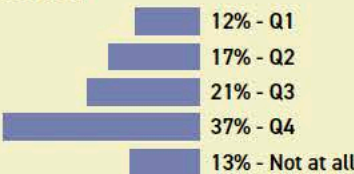
What is your rough estimate of the number of employees at your company this year compared to the number employed last year at this time?



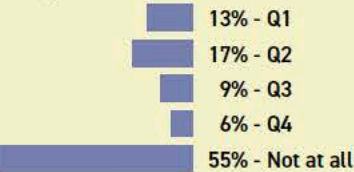
What is your prediction for the number of events you will cater in 2024 versus 2023?



How far into 2024 are events of any kind being booked?



How far into 2025 are events of any kind being booked?



What key steps are you taking in 2024 to improve your business?



Additionally, relative to consumer spending and adjusted for inflation, employment in key industries like foodservice and accommodation is still well below pre-pandemic levels, with almost two million jobs below the trend based on consumer spending, according to the Instawork report.

These continued labor shortages limit how much revenue the industry can bring in. For example, operators have had to reduce the number of events they accept because they literally can't find enough employees to staff them.

Additionally, SupHerb Farms reported that 65% of operators are hiring less qualified staff, with 32% reporting that their culinary skill is lower today than it was a year ago (just 6% reported higher culinary skill). Turnover is steep and the staff

that food businesses do retain are demanding more money than ever—with 75% of operators noting an increase in labor costs, according to SupHerb Farms.

"We all know that staffing is a big issue," said Francisco Christian (Taylored Hospitality Solutions) in an ICA webinar.

A chaotic supply chain

Caterers continued to grapple with supply chain disruptions throughout 2023, and this is expected to continue into 2024. According to SupHerb Farms' white paper, *Navigating the Supply Chain*, three in four operators are experiencing more out-of-stock ingredients this year than ever before.

Methods for building resilient supply chains included such solutions as

exploring local sourcing options and strategic partnerships. Technology also played a crucial role in enhancing supply chain visibility and mitigating risks, ensuring a steady and reliable stream of ingredients for catering operations.

Operators have discovered that versatile ingredients used across numerous menu items can help to ease sourcing headaches while also offering the benefit of price breaks. What's more, by reducing the number of ingredients on which your staff needs to be trained, operators are seeing an upturn in overall efficiency. According to a press release from Craftable, a hospitality management program designed to drive profitability and lower labor costs, menu engineering—a technique that analyzes each item's contribution to the profit against

Continued on page 113



During the International Caterers Association Workshop in August, attendees enjoyed an al fresco dinner at The Foundry Courtyard hosted by Dish Food & Events. Photo courtesy International Caterers Association/Dish Food & Events



Staff prep dinner during the International Caterers Association Workshop at Dish Food & Events in August. Photo courtesy International Caterers Association/Dish Food & Events



Constellation Culinary Group employed a kitchen robot during its Apéritif Reception. Photo courtesy Carolina Guzik Photography



Flippy from Miso Robotics is the world's first-ever AI-powered robotic fry cook. With its incredible multitasking capabilities, Flippy can fry frozen ingredients and plate finished food with remarkable precision while keeping multiple recipes on the go. Photo courtesy Miso Robotics



Moley Robotics' robotic kitchen features a dexterous robot integrated into a luxury kitchen, that prepares freshly-cooked meals at the touch of a button. Photo courtesy Moley Robotics



Nala Robotics exhibited during the National Restaurant Association Show (held in May in Chicago) where it demonstrated its Pizzaiola (robotic pizza maker). Photo courtesy Nala Robotics



Dexai's robot dubbed "Alfred" is a food safe-certified robotic arm that can sit in front of a row of hotel pans of ingredients, and uses traditional kitchen utensils like scoops and tongs. Photo courtesy Lane Turner/Boston Globe

how often it is purchased—is the key to consistently high margins when used effectively.

Runaway inflation

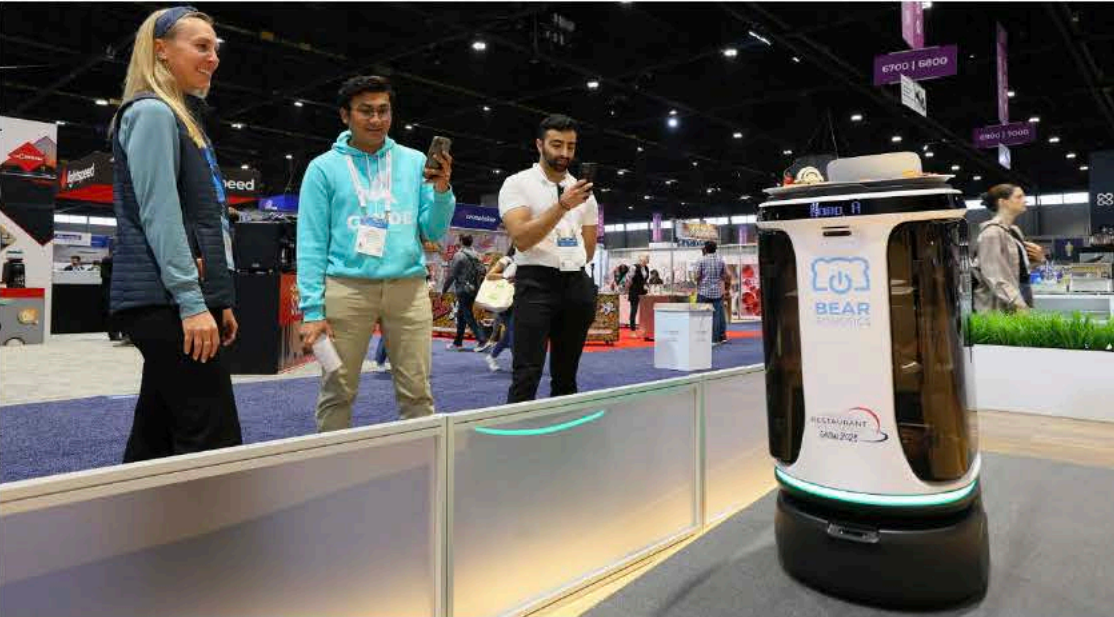
Pricing is obviously one of the more challenging areas of running a business, as you must balance the market value of your offerings with the costs of operating. For catering and foodservice companies, such a calculation gets trickier as the cost of ingredients and other products are subject to change with the market. “Runaway inflation and staff shortages have increased the cost of food and labor. Surfing the breaks and swells brought on by circumstances beyond their control requires the restaurant industry to adopt a new way of thinking to adapt to the ebbs and flows,” said Brian Duncan, President of me&cu USA, in a press release. Food prices rose 3.7% between

September 2022 and September 2023, according to the most recent consumer price index (CPI) report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. By comparison, at the same time in 2022 prices rose 11.2% over a one-year period. According to SubHerb Farms, there has been a 29% average price inflation reported by fresh fruit and vegetables this year. According to Christian, inflation will most likely end the year around 4.3% with a potential drop in January and February. “Those prices are not going to come down, we just hope they stay the same,” said Clint Elkins (SB Value) in the ICA webinar. In addition to food prices, inflation is also having an impact on what clients are willing to spend on their events. According to the *Catersource* survey, clients are becoming more budget conscious. “Clients are requesting to sacrifice quality for price,” said one respondent.

“Budgets are tighter than 2022 and that is driving menu selection,” said another.

The tech revolution

Efficiency is the name of the game in catering, and technology is the linchpin; the modern kitchen is becoming a tech hub. From AI-powered menu customization to blockchain-enabled supply chain transparency, catering businesses are leveraging technology to streamline operations and stay ahead of the curve. Online ordering platforms, virtual tastings, and interactive menus are becoming standard practices, catering to the digital preferences of today’s consumers. “When new technology comes out, people tend to fall into one of two camps: either they are excited by the potential benefits and become early adopters or they are leery about the downsides that may come with



Bear Robotics displayed its Servi robots during the 2023 National Restaurant Association Show. Servi can help run food or bus dishes. Photo courtesy National Restaurant Association

it, and they wait to explore it until the kinks have been worked out or it becomes absolutely necessary to adopt,” said Anthony Lambatos in an article for [Catersource](#).

Artificial intelligence

In 2023, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as an essential ingredient of food and beverage innovation. AI is being used to optimize everything from crop growth to formulating innovative products to recommending menu items.

“Though AI is far from its full potential, it’s clear that the food industry will find countless tasks and uses for this emerging technology,” says the SupHerb Farms’ trend report.

A few of the ways AI can be applied in the catering industry include:

- Menu planning and optimization: AI algorithms can analyze customer preferences, dietary

restrictions, and trending food items to suggest optimized menus. Additionally, predictive analytics can help caterers anticipate demand for specific dishes, reducing food waste and optimizing inventory.

- Order management: AI-powered systems can streamline order processing, managing orders efficiently, and reducing errors. Additionally, chatbots or virtual assistants can handle customer inquiries, process orders, and provide real-time updates.
- Supply chain management: AI can be used to optimize supply chain logistics, helping to manage inventory levels, predict demand, and reduce costs. Additionally, automated systems can track and manage the procurement of ingredients, ensuring timely deliveries and minimizing disruptions.
- Personalized customer experience: AI can analyze customer data

to personalize the catering experience, providing tailored recommendations and offers. Additionally, chatbots and virtual assistants can handle customer queries and provide information about menu options, pricing, and event details.

- Predictive maintenance: AI-powered systems can monitor catering equipment and predict when maintenance is needed, reducing downtime and preventing unexpected failures.
- Quality control: AI vision systems can be used to monitor the quality of food preparation, ensuring consistency and adherence to quality standards.

AI can even help [improve sales processes and results](#).

Throughout 2023 there was also growing demand for smart appliances, such as smart ovens that can automatically adjust cooking

times and temperatures based on the type of food being prepared or AI-powered refrigerators that can monitor expiration dates and suggest recipes based on the ingredients available.

The AMEX 2024 Global Meetings and Events Forecast found that 42% of respondents said they expect to use AI in 2024.

“As caterers and event professionals we must embrace these advancements, the stage is set for a tech-driven renaissance that will define the industry landscape in 2024 and beyond,” says Meryl Snow (SnowStorm Solutions).

Robotics

Robots, once limited to the realm of science fiction, are now making their mark in the catering world.

These intelligent machines are transforming the way caterers prepare, cook, and serve food, offering unprecedented levels of efficiency, precision, and consistency.

Between the emergence of robot chefs, fully-automated robotic kitchens, and service robots, 2023 has been a game-changer in the catering industry.

These technology innovations that automate and streamline processes are freeing up catering and event professionals to focus on the creative and relational work that is so pivotal to the industry, leaving the repetitive, tedious tasks to tech.

“Humans do what they do best. Let robots do the rest,” said Steve Kane, who works with Pringle Robotics in their Hospitality Innovation department in an article

for [Catersource](#). “Robots, especially service robots, exist to do the dull, dirty, or dangerous jobs that can sap people’s time, joy, and motivation at work. Now no one’s saying that catering is dangerous, but there can be a lot of repetition, a lot of physical strain, and steps involved in catering and events work. When robots can automatically do some of the not-so-fun tasks, it creates a better environment for workers and their customers. People can focus on the higher-value work that’s uniquely human. And they do all of this without tiring. Basically, they allow great catering staff to be even better because they have the time and energy to focus on guest experience.”

The key to harnessing the power of these new and emerging technologies, though, is a thorough evaluation of the benefits.



Pringle Robotics currently offers a number of different service robots including KettyBOT, which can simplify hosting, guiding, delivery, and advertising. Photo courtesy Pringle Robotics



Chippy from Miso Robotics is designed to fry one or two high-volume products that need seasoning and finishing—such as tortilla chips. Photo courtesy Miso Robotics



World Centric aims to provide their customers with products that can improve sustainability goals and help increase the diversion of organic materials away from landfills. Photo courtesy World Centric



World Centric has both single and double compartment catering platters, matching flat and raised lids, as well as serving utensils. Photo courtesy World Centric



World Centric offers products that are made from plant-based or recycled materials, and their products are either compostable or recyclable. Photo courtesy World Centric



These container sleeves, which help keep food safe and trays closed during transportation, are 100% compostable. Photo courtesy World Centric

“Just because new technology exists doesn’t mean it should be implemented,” said Lambatos. “While artificial intelligence tools, robots, and other emerging technologies dominate headlines, leaders need to determine what is applicable to their businesses and their teams both in the short and long term. By evaluating the resources necessary as well as the impact on both guests and employees, they can make informed decisions that will lead to the successful implementation of new technology.”

Going green

Sustainability is no longer a buzzword; it’s a crucial aspect of businesses today. As environmental consciousness grows, sustainability has become a focal point for the catering industry. Consumers are increasingly demanding eco-friendly options,

pushing caterers to adopt sustainable sourcing practices, reduce food waste, and embrace eco-conscious packaging while ensuring a smaller carbon footprint.

“Sustainability has never been more important to a wide range of consumers, especially given the last few years of significant and more extreme weather events,” the SupHerb Farms’ trend report states. “Though consumers have been challenged to spend the same amount of money on sustainable products in the face of inflation in 2023, there’s no question that sustainability is now elevated in many consumers’ minds and that they will begin to seriously seek out sustainable options once inflation begins to subside. Sustainability will impact food ingredients, packaging, delivery, and manufacturer and operator in-house behavior.”

Ingredient sourcing

Sourcing ingredients from far and wide can carry a significant price tag as you shoulder the costs of climate-controlled storage and transportation. “Needless to say, shipping food around the world is not an eco-friendly solution,” said Elkins in an [article for Catersource](#). So instead, skip the shipping and handling surcharges and take advantage of your local food scene, including butchers, farmers, beekeepers, brewers, and other specialists. Some caterers are even getting extra local by [producing their own ingredients](#). By working only with vendors who follow [sustainability practices](#) and source responsibly, you can reduce the damaging effects of your event and actually harness long term community.



Boxed Water is a sustainable alternative to plastic bottles and aluminum cans that is 92% plant-based and 100% recyclable. Photo courtesy Buzz Orr Multimedia



The CanSPEP 2021 conference worked with a reusable container company to replace disposable food packaging. Photo courtesy Explore Waterloo Region



For a wedding by Kathryn Cooper Weddings, the couple used their personal collection of glassware and antique books as the centerpieces for their wedding. Photo courtesy Kathryn Cooper Weddings



M Culinary Concepts uses compostable bowls and provides clearly labeled recycling and compost bins to better reduce waste. Photo courtesy M Culinary Concepts

Reducing food waste

With nearly one-third of all food produced being wasted, the food and beverage industry is looking for every opportunity to [upcycle would-be-waste](#). By repurposing by-products or discarded ingredients, companies can reduce waste while producing delicious and sustainable products.

Earlier this year, [Special Events magazine](#) took a deep dive into the steps the events industry can take in an effort to reduce carbon emissions, a key step being reducing food waste.

According to a [report by Hubspot](#), some of the best ways to reduce carbon emissions from food waste include:

- Minimize excess food from the start through accurate measurement and clear communication (between catering team, attendees, client, etc.)
- Donate leftover food to local organizations for redistribution
- Provide organics waste removal for composting food waste
- Practice sustainable sourcing, food waste diversion, and use biodegradable or reusable materials for dinnerware and food station setup

Another exciting area in the fight against food waste is technology which enables companies to reduce waste during production. One recent example is the use of AI and robotics to [sort compost from trash](#).

“70% of what goes into the recycling container at any of your homes and any of your businesses is all straight to the landfill, because you put it in the wrong things, or those products can’t be recycled,” said Chef Paul Buchanan (Primal Alchemy) during his Catersource + The Special Event 2023 session *Talkin’ Trash: A Candid Conversation about Zero Waste*.

Unconventional serving ware

There has been a significant shift from single-use plastic and paper products. Yet, while moving to reusable items like china and glassware is a step in the right direction, it’s not entirely zero-waste. After all, they require electricity, water, dish soap, and labor to properly clean, sanitize, and store.

Instead, the food and beverage industry is pivoting toward sustainable packaging solutions, aiming to reduce its carbon footprint. From plant-based plastics to zero-waste packaging, businesses are innovating to meet consumer demand for eco-conscious alternatives.



Offering guests reusable bottles keeps material in the supply chain and eliminates waste immediately. Photo courtesy M Culinary Concepts

Nearly one-third of U.S. consumers recently switched brands based on plant-based and compostable packaging in both foodservice and grocery channels, according to World Centric. Additionally, in the past year, over half (55%) of U.S. consumers have changed their brand purchasing behaviors in grocery or foodservice channels because of access to compostable or plant-based packaging.

Edible packaging is quickly becoming a solution to cut out waste by harnessing innovation. For instance, you might swap out a traditional glass bowl for a cored apple served with gelato in it. Or perhaps you replace metal spoons with a garlicky spoon-shaped cracker to serve with a tasty bowl of bisque. In fact, earlier this year, the University of Cambridge spun off Xampla, a startup developing edible and biodegradable plant-based packaging.

The sustainable packaging market for food and beverage is expected to exceed \$100 billion in value over the next five years, according to [Gourmet Pro](#).

More often than not, what’s good for the planet is also good for your local community. And what’s good for your community is good for your catering business.

Looking ahead to 2024

As we savor the triumphs and challenges of the catering industry in 2023, our gaze inevitably turns toward the future. What lies ahead for catering businesses in 2024?

A major shift in 2024 will be clients’ increased reliance on caterers, on more than just food.

“There will be more interest and buying of services beyond outstanding food,” says Porter. “More prospects will look for caterers and special event producers that can take on more event execution production responsibility. The better prospects and clients don’t have the time to shop all around and deal with coordinating 10 creative partners for an event. So be ready to act more as a general contractor instead of just a food provider.


“We’re going to have to develop a Seal Team Six attitude—service anywhere, anytime, and under any condition.”


This may be due to the fact that consumers are nervous about a possible recession.

“Consumers are just a little bit lost right now,” said Datassential Senior Director, Publications Ann Golladay in a [webinar](#). “One month things can feel pretty good and then a month later, things kind of head a little downhill again. There’s a lot of variation and uncertainty.”

However, the foodservice industry is more positive than negative, which could lead to things like menu innovation or upgrades.

Additionally, we can expect the business boom of the last two years to start leveling out in 2024, and we may even see a drop in wedding business because not very many new relationships started during the pandemic.

“In my career to date, I don’t think I have ever been as excited as I am for 2024,” says Sebastien Centner (Eatertainment Events & Catering). “I believe 2024 will bring stability back to our industry after three years of the roller-coaster ride created by the pandemic and post-pandemic periods. Companies and clients will of course still need to navigate ongoing economic and social challenges, but behind us will be the unknown of whether the world may come to another full or partial stop. We will be able to plan for the medium and long-term future, start thinking about events, programs, and conferences two and three years out (like we used to) and best of all, be able to invest in growing our businesses with a more positive sense of confidence of where things are going.” 



25 Positive Predictions for 2024

LET'S START OFF THE NEW YEAR WITH SOME POSITIVITY!

We asked several top industry thought leaders to share their perspectives on 2023 as it ends, and what we can look forward to as we round the corner into a shiny new year.

BY AMBER KISPERT

1 Kathryn Albarado, Generational Business and Life Coach

The last few years have been challenging for the event world, especially caterers. The ability to stop the collapsing of the dominos seemed endless. Caterers went from dealing with the cancellation of events due to COVID, to the break in the supply chain, and then the lack of finding and keeping qualified staff. Now the biggest challenge is the unrealistic expectations customers have placed on the service industry.

Catering isn't for the faint of heart. The truth is, we do it because we have a servant's heart. Feeding people not just in body but in soul is where we get our greatest satisfaction. My hope for 2024 is that we see staffing stabilize. The stabilization of labor will help caterers do what they do best—provide memorable meals for memorable events.

best, creating full vegetarian menus and vegan menus, and putting systems in place to accommodate and excel at these will be a huge difference-maker in the future.

Another new trend is to cut down on the lines at stations and pass the entrées or tapas-style plates. For example, crab cakes with Brussels slaw, pork belly, and a caper remoulade on a small plate passed—this way, guests get to enjoy a fully designed plate without having to get in line. These are great for cocktail receptions or even large parties where servers can get to guests while they are mingling and sharing stories. We see small chef-composed plates that can get anywhere are a future trend in our industry.

3 Alan Berg, Owner, Wedding Business Solutions

The wedding industry is in for a bumpy ride as the wedding gap kicks in. If you haven't heard about the "wedding gap," it's that during the COVID lockdowns people weren't out meeting other people, so relationships that would have naturally formed without being sequestered didn't happen. Therefore, about three years later the engagements that would have happened aren't happening. That will even itself out in a year or two, but for now, expect fewer engagements, so fewer inquiries. But don't fret; you probably already are getting more inquiries than you could fill, so just get better at following up and converting the inquiries you are getting into sales.

2 Todd Annis, Director of Culinary, Cru Catering

The simple pleasure of bread and butter will be something to look for in the future. In addition, breads and butters that meet some of the restrictions (gluten-free, vegan, and carb-friendly) will all help this trend succeed in the future.

Speaking of dietary restrictions, specific dietary and preferential needs are not going away any time soon. Catching up to those needs is pivotal in the future. Labeling signs, labeling menus, having a chef team that can produce specialty items at their



Kathryn Albarado



Todd Annis



Alan Berg

25 Positive Predictions for 2024

Margaret Brower, Founder & CEO, Rainmaker Sales & Marketing Group

As we stand on the cusp of 2024, I foresee a transformative shift in the world of catering bookings, particularly for weddings. The middle, that familiar 12–14 month booking window we've grown accustomed to, we are poised to see less of.

But here's the twist: it's not just about shorter timelines; it's also about looking further ahead.

On one end of the spectrum, we'll witness a surge of "in the month for the month" bookings. Think of it as the corporate business model making its way into the wedding scene. The instant gratification of the "add to cart" mindset is upon us. These short-term wedding bookings will demand our immediate attention, agility, and intention. We'll need to approach them with the same fervor we reserve for corporate clients.

In essence, 2024 is set to be a year of duality for catering sales. We'll be sprinting for those immediate bookings while also setting our sights on the horizon. It's a delicate balance, but with eagerness, adaptability, and a dash of foresight, we can navigate this evolving landscape with grace and success.

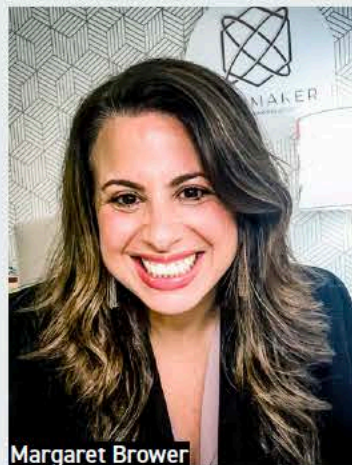
Colbért Callen, Director Sales + Marketing, Footers Catering

I foresee the catering industry returning to elegant roots in 2024. The pivots are over, our teams are back to full capacity,

and we are ready to deliver on what attracted us to our unique niche of hospitality to begin with. Next year clients will value style, grace, and attention to detail more than ever before. Caterers are striving to be the best again (not merely just surviving post-COVID), and the ability to deliver perfect touches will be a big competitive advantage. Don't mistake elegance for boring or traditional; innovation and creativity will continue to be crucial to the catering industry, but a unique idea isn't enough. Elegance is achieved when a creative concept is executed perfectly, from the physical details of plating, garnishes, signage, and vessels to the intangible touches of lighting, timing, smiles, and delight—that magic that caterers have the power to create when every detail of the guest experience is seamless. In 2024, clients, guests, and our own team will seek that elegance.

Sebastien Centner, Founder and Creative Director, Eatertainment Events & Catering

I see two major positive things happening in 2024. On the culinary side, the rise of quality and variety of special dietary ingredients, like gluten-free and vegan items. Changing how people look at food, no longer having to sacrifice flavor or quality to meet certain dietary needs. In terms of technology, I think AI may pose a massive risk. It will undoubtedly change how we work, especially on the creative front, increasing efficiencies and reducing costs for things like copywriting and graphic design.



Margaret Brower



Colbért Callen



Sebastien Centner

Jamie Chang, Owner and Destination Wedding Planner, Mango Muse Events

I see 2024 as the turning point for the industry (particularly in the U.S.) to take big steps toward sustainability. Those already doing great work will be at the forefront, leading the way, but all event businesses, big and small, will take major steps and changes towards zero waste and sustainable events. At this point, everyone has been affected by climate change in a real and tangible way, whether that's with major weather disasters or just feeling the increased heat. It's time for a major change in our industry, and I think many in the events industry are realizing that.

I see changes happening not only within businesses themselves and how they operate but also in the options presented to the end client. Because we see everything that goes into a one-time event and what happens after, change at the industry level in terms of offerings and ideas will, in turn, trickle down to clients. The more aware and sustainably forward-thinking we as an industry are, the more clients will be, too, so that we can collectively approach events with sustainability in mind.

Francisco Christian, Founder, Tailored Hospitality

2024 will see a huge impact from technology in the catering industry. More companies are finally moving from Excel and Word to fully integrated software platforms. In addition, ChatGPT has been helping not only the sales side of the business, but operations is

benefiting from the wealth of standard operating procedures and processes available like never before. I'm so excited when a client realizes how technology can give them time back to work on the business and it impacts profitability positively. I'm excited to see how AI is learning about the catering industry just by more and more users seeking information. Soon, companies will be able to use the technology to unleash the data that they own to help their creative process.

In addition, our clients are realizing that doing business the way that it has been done needs to change. We are working with companies that are now understanding the short sales cycle and coming up with unique ways to help their sales teams qualify faster and get deposits quicker. As the Amazon buyers try to apply their instant gratification needs to catering and special events, companies that are agile and able to not overcomplicate the sales process will be victorious.

Ryan Corvaia, Founder & Owner, Dish Food & Events

Since we have all been paying more for just about everything in 2023 and into 2024, client expectations at catered events are on the rise. I predict the hospitality landscape will continue to evolve as our clients place a stronger emphasis on an elevated guest experience at special events.

I see this as a fantastic opportunity for caterers and event companies to focus on training their teams to not only deliver top notch service, but to go above and beyond in creating "wow moments" and



Jamie Chang



Francisco Christian



Ryan Corvaia

25 Positive Predictions for 2024

thus providing only the best hospitality. Is it even possible to treat every guest like they are the last guest on earth?

To do this, we must create a company culture where our entire service team feels empowered to go above and beyond for each guest we serve. When you encourage your team to bring their creativity to the guest experience, they will become more willing to work hard to make sure that experience is great.

10 Tayler Cusick Hollman, Founder, Enji

If you've been chasing page-one rankings on search engines, 2024 is going to be the year you can make serious moves! Because the thing no one is talking about, but should be talking about, is how AI is impacting how people search for things on the internet.

My prediction is that as more people use ChatGPT as a search engine and as Google makes a shift to a chat-like interface, the rankings slate will be "wiped clean" to a certain extent as businesses don't adapt their SEO strategy—and we all can take advantage of that. Websites and web pages that have historically ranked high will start to slip if the people in charge of them don't have their eyes on this change, so even though this prediction isn't great for some businesses, it is a very positive opportunity for others!

11 Meghan Ely, Owner, OFD Consulting

Having a front seat to WIPA's record growth post-pandemic, I'm

confident we'll see event brands continue to prioritize association membership and networking events as part of their visibility strategy.

I'm also seeing the desire to serve as a leader at an all-time high. In fact, we experienced a 30% increase in nomination applications to the WIPA International Board this year. Event pros are ready to give back in droves and help shape what is to become of the hospitality industry for the next generation of clients and companies.

Better yet, associations with a future-forward mindset will thrive, recognizing that the needs of event pros today look different than 10, 15 years ago. Expect reimaged education, innovative attendee experiences, and thoughtful partnerships with leading brands.

12 Scott Frankel, President, Animatic Media, LLC

Things for the events industry have never looked brighter. As those of us who survived the greatest test of our industry, I feel like 2023 proved that we are back in a strong way and it's looking like 2024 will break some records. It has been specifically challenging on the production side of things as we lost a lot of talented people during the pandemic for a number of reasons. However, that staffing pool has begun to renew itself with a new generation of upcoming talent. We are looking at some new groundbreaking technology that, combined with creative thinking, will undoubtedly result in some unique and memorable audience experiences.



Tayler Cusick Hollman



Meghan Ely



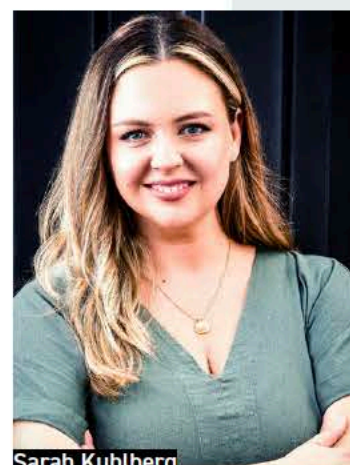
Scott Frankel



Cristian Hernandez



Julia Kendrick Conway



Sarah Kuhlberg

13 Cristian Hernandez, Director of Business Development, Rosendale Events

When it comes to new food and beverage trends, our culinary director Certified Master Chef Rich Rosendale doesn't miss a beat. From marvelous and artistic dessert presentations to the most unique and sophisticated serving robots, he is looking at what the future may bring. In fact, we recently opened R3 Rosendale Concepts, a restaurant located in the downtown Atlanta area, and took a sustainable and innovative approach by eliminating the use of hoods, grills, and fryers found in traditional restaurants. This demonstrates a new model for opening fine-dining restaurants that lowers costs while still ensuring quality.

With labor shortage still being a predominant issue that caterers are facing, we are also looking to see how we can better utilize our employees. Our main focus is on training and retaining employees to lower the turnover rate. We hold monthly training sessions, offer incentives, and recognize our staff for their efforts and achievements. The future of catering is bright and with the right people, the right mindset, and obtainable goals, you can reach the stars.

14 Julia Kendrick Conway, Owner, Assaggiare Mendocino

We are booking new events at a brisk pace for 2024. Definitely different from this time last year. While overall planning timelines have shortened back to pre-pandemic levels, clients

seem to be more optimistic about forward planning than last year. Most of our events are destination weddings, and overall, headcounts are down but budgets are not. While being conscious of their budgets, clients are willing to spend on items that are significant to them. This allows us more flexibility in planning unique and special menus and service elements tailored to the respective couples and their celebrations. Our clients seem to be more focused on personal details that reflect their values, experiences, and aspirations rather than sticking to the tried-and-true rituals. They want their celebration to be an inclusive and immersive experience for their families and guests, celebrating the things that make them special as a couple. They often want to incorporate special cocktails, appetizers, and snacks that reflect their shared histories and heritages. Since we are full-custom, this fits well within our business model.

15 Sarah Kuhlberg, Creative Marketing Director, Colette's Catering & Events

In the upcoming year, individuals will be redefining their spending preferences to prioritize experiences of special significance. The human yearning for meaningful connections and mindful experiences has never been more pronounced. Special occasions, travel, upscale dinner parties, and curated events are all set to be on the rise in 2024. The event industry is perfectly poised to deliver those coveted moments of connection and mindfulness that we so deeply desire! Whether it's corporations celebrating their achievements,

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families and friends reuniting in joyous gatherings, or weddings with larger guest counts, there's a resounding shift towards valuing experiences over material possessions.

Also, food and cocktail trends we currently see at innovative, cutting-edge restaurants are increasingly making their way to the catering table and bar. Catering companies that offer curated, chef-driven menus will be in higher demand. This forthcoming year promises to be one where culinary innovation and thoughtful event design converge to create lasting impressions in the hearts and minds of individuals.



Anthony Lambatos

16 Anthony Lambatos, Co-Owner, Footers Catering and MIBE

While hiring has gotten easier over the past year, I think it will still be a challenge moving into 2024, specifically attracting and retaining top talent in the catering and events industry. Employees have more options than ever on where they want to work, how they want to work, who they want to work with, and what work they want to do. I believe this will inspire companies to be more creative than ever when it comes to looking out for the overall well-being of their employees. Creating a place where team members love working and others aspire to work for starts with valuing people for more than the job they do. To demonstrate this, companies are going to look beyond traditional benefits and find unique ways to respond to the mental, physical, relational, and financial well-being of their team members. Leadership

development training, access to mental health resources, childcare support, home buying assistance, flexible work schedules, community involvement, and wellness programs are just a few of the areas that companies will add or enhance to meet the needs of their employees. And the companies that are able to do this well will reduce time spent hiring and training and they are going to see a surge in engagement, collaboration, and innovation.

17 Jennifer Perna, Owner, Fulton Market Consulting

2024 is going to be a great year. I can already see this by looking at how 2024 is shaping up on my regular clients' event calendars. 2024 bookings have already surpassed 2023 numbers at this same time last year. This is especially true for those who've been actively working on 2024's Q1 and Q2 since this summer. Sales teams are in place now. Weddings are steadily back and guest counts are bigger. Most Saturdays at venues are already sold out and wedding couples are looking at alternate weekdays or 2025. The last few years have allowed companies to define their niche and stay focused on how to best use their resources. Minimums and booking rules are also being reevaluated to make sure great opportunities are not being missed. This means that smart selling and educating the sales team on what is good business is imperative as you move forward. 2024 is really feeling good for all right now and I can't wait to see where we are at this time next year!



Jennifer Perna

18 David Porto, Owner, Blue Plate Catering

The next calendar year will continue to bring an emphasis on extravagant, styled weddings, with a desire to show family and friends a wonderful time. Social media has made it possible to broadcast great ideas to a wide audience, and the younger generation of couples has grown up not knowing anything else. Adapting to clients' one-off requests will be the marker of an organization that can customize and go with the flow.

On the corporate side, last-minute requests for large catering orders will continue, and the ability to accept these "Hail Mary passes" will allow you to strengthen bonds with clients. Making them look good is truly what will bring more of their business to you. 2024 will also see an increase in repetitive business as companies try to win over prospective employees (and keep their current talent) by offering meals during the workday. If you are in the drop-off business, get ready for some big orders!

19 Robin Selden, Managing Partner & Executive Chef, Marcia Selden Catering & Events

Love is in the air at Marcia Selden Catering as we are stepping into 2024 with more confirmed weddings than we've had in years past...how great is that?! Our couples are excited to embrace creativity and to allow us to come up with fun and enchanting ways to surprise and delight their guests and they are ready to spend money

to make their dreams become a reality (YAY!). Our couples are embracing the endless possibilities allowing us to craft meticulously unique and super creative culinary experiences that reflect their style and often times their cultural heritage. I believe that the guest experience at weddings, and events, are at the heart of each event, particularly in what we are seeing for 2024.... It's all about the X-factor and experiential moments. Our goal is to leave a lasting (and delicious) impression on the guests so that they reminisce about the event for many years to come. I say it all the time; we are memory makers, so let's all make sure that in 2024 that we are embracing that gift that we are given by our clients to create bespoke, magical, and sometimes over the top opulent events for them and their guests!

20 Nora Sheils, Co-Founder, Rock Paper Coin and Founder, Bridal Bliss

Although 2023 was pretty magical, 2024 is set to be just as gorgeous, with more opulence in the most thoughtful of ways.

We love the color trends—vibrant coral, bold yellow, and electric blue. These colors won't be seen throughout a wedding but instead used as a pop in one part of the event, whether it be the dining tables, attire, or even the cake! The term "maximalism" comes to mind, and if ever there were a year to go big, this would be it!

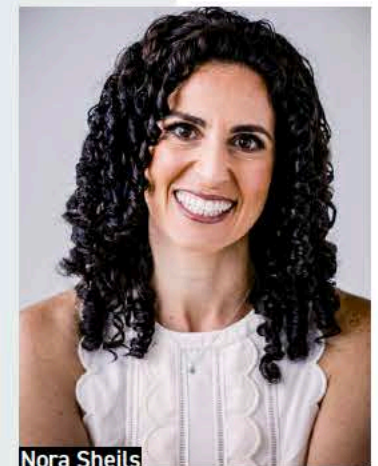
The mindset of many couples is a focus on sustainability. While that concept may seem disconnected from the others mentioned, they can go hand in hand. Couples ultimately want to be thoughtful



David Porto



Robin Selden



Nora Sheils

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in all of their decisions. This may include estate jewelry, printing invitations on upcycled materials, working with a local caterer to ensure food is current to the season and grown/harvested locally, charity-based registries, and vendors that give back.

Many event pros are taking the slow season to level up their businesses, incorporating new software, and bettering their processes to provide their clients and teams with the best possible experience. From automation to virtual contracts/invoices, the options to streamline businesses are endless.

21 Alicia Smith, Executive Chef, Cru Catering

Gone are the days when you are only allowed to pick a different protein for your event. This gives guests the opportunity to experience the perfect dish of their choice without being limited to only a protein switch. While this requires more servers and more chef staff, it gives each client a “restaurant” quality choice and meal.

Additionally, more and more people are looking for engaging stations with the best possible foods. Not only do guests want something more engaging than just a plate of food; it becomes a team effort to bring the vision to life. No longer will it be just a caterer doing just food, the planner just planning, and the florist just putting out flowers. In the future, it will require much more listening, communication, and planning together—another reason it is so important to get to know each of our vendors and how we interact together cohesively.

Lastly, it's all about the mash ups. With the ability to get so much produce and products from around the world, it is imperative to be able to include them in your menus. As a catering chef, you must be good at knowing all types of ingredients, flavors, and cuisines to accomplish this. It will be future learning of these things that separate different companies.

22 Meryl Snow, Owner, SnowStorm Solutions

In the optimistic landscape of 2024, the catering and event industry is poised for a technological revolution, with artificial intelligence (AI) playing a central role in transforming key aspects of operations. Caterers will benefit from AI-driven innovations such as menu planning, where algorithms analyze trends and preferences to design on-trend menus, with recipes and even wine pairing. Event professionals will have the power of predictive analytics, utilizing AI to anticipate attendance, forecast peak activity times, and even predict menu preferences based on historical data. The integration of facial recognition technology ensures seamless and secure check-ins, while AI-driven chatbots provide instant responses to queries, freeing up professionals to focus on strategic planning. The industry will witness a shift towards dynamic pricing models, optimizing costs based on market demand and competitor pricing, while AI-enhanced security systems analyze crowd behavior to identify potential risks.

The positive impact of AI extends to logistics and supply chain management, automating inventory processes, tracking



Alicia Smith



Meryl Snow



Melissa Tibben



Jacqueline Vizcaino

23 Melissa Tibben, Client Relations Success Manager, Total Party Planner

In 2024, the catering industry is poised for significant transformations. Firstly, we anticipate a surge in startups entering the scene, driven by an increasing demand for unique culinary experiences and specialized services. These newcomers will bring fresh ideas, innovative technologies, and exciting menus to the table, ultimately reshaping the industry landscape.

Simultaneously, established catering companies will be focusing on enhancing their company culture. Recognizing the crucial role culture plays in employee satisfaction and productivity, owners will invest in creating a positive and inclusive work environment. This cultural shift will not only improve staff retention but also enhance service quality.

Furthermore, 2024 will witness a strategic overhaul among industry veterans. Owners will be diligently working on streamlining operations, optimizing cost-efficiency, and devising exit strategies. This may include exploring retirement options and welcoming

perishable goods, and optimizing delivery routes. Tools driven by AI will enable real-time feedback analysis, allowing professionals to gauge attendee satisfaction and address concerns promptly. The industry is on the cusp of a transformative era where AI not only streamlines operations but also enhances the overall guest experience.

managing partners with deep company knowledge. These meticulous details will contribute to increased efficiency and profitability, ensuring these businesses remain competitive in an evolving market.

As the catering industry continues to evolve, adapting to changing customer preferences and market dynamics, 2024 promises to be a year of innovation, culture-building, and strategic refinement, ultimately benefiting both industry professionals and clients alike.

24 Jacqueline Vizcaino, Owner, Tinted Events Design and Planning

As we look ahead to future events in 2024, one of the most promising aspects to focus on will be inclusivity. With growing awareness of diversity, inclusivity, and belonging, an emphasis on the representation of people from diverse and underrepresented groups, such as people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those with disabilities and various cultural backgrounds, will result in a diverse attendee and vendor partner roster lending to a more welcoming environment for all.

2024 looks bright with the conscious incorporation of these values in planning strategies, curating events that not only entertain and educate but also promote a sense of harmony and representation among all attendees. Clients will expect to see diversity in our content, programs, and workshops, creating a safe place for attendees to share their experiences.

Diversity will not stop there; every element will be more

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inclusive, with the event staff, food and beverage options that cater to different dietary or non-alcoholic needs, gender-neutral restrooms, and technological advancements that will allow for an inclusive and accessible event experience for our neurodivergent individuals. 2024 will be a coming together to celebrate and learn, creating an enriching experience for everyone involved.

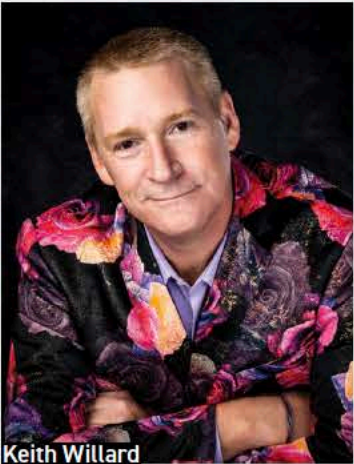
25 Keith Willard, Owner, Keith Willard Events

Location, location, location. Americans are traveling at record numbers. Everyone has seen the news reports from all over the world but here in the U.S. as well. Couples are looking outward for their big day. It's not enough to have a local wedding—they want to get out and explore! And so do their guests. We are going to

continue to see the upswing in destination weddings. More and more couples are seeing this as an attainable option, especially since during COVID, it became the norm for certain family members and friends to not be able to attend the wedding, even if it was local. This has freed up the minds and creativity of couples, who are no longer bound by the idea that "everyone" must be invited.

With this new mindset, there will be more freedom in options that the couples are looking for. Beachside, rooftop, unique menus, interesting entertainment, and experiences not only provide a wow effect but a memory their guests will have forever.

This also includes what were set-in-stone traditions. Spirituality is on the rise, and I'm starting to see weddings combined with retreats and ceremonies conducted by shamans that connect people on a deeper level. The world is our oyster! 🌊



Keith Willard

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