

Events North: Making a Difference in Every Direction

By Bona Van Dis

Events North, with owner Allison Beers at the wheel, has spent eight years creating the most memorable events for every one of its clients. The business has a host of awards under its belt to prove just that, and constantly strives to make a difference in all it does – from zero waste events to ensuring that cost savings are passed along to each customer.

Beers opened Events North in 2008, when the economy was at its worst. She had returned to her job after maternity leave to discover that her position had been eliminated. That was the catalyst for her to strike out on her own, and Events North has grown every year beyond her wildest dreams.

Events North prides itself on honesty and transparency – two key components to success. These pivotal factors have won Events North awards like the *Michigan Meetings + Events Magazine's* 2015 Readers' Choice Best of Winner for Best Meeting Planning Company. And Beers, along with another staff member have been inducted into the Hall of Fame for Best Special Events Planners by the same magazine.

Focus asked Beers about the importance of ethical behavior, how to create a great event on a dime and how she manages to get everything done:

Focus: Events North hosts everything from corporate and association meetings to fundraisers for non-profits and special events. Tell us how you manage it all.

Beers: We are very organized and use our time very wisely. We have a lot of "to-do" lists. We start each day looking at the list and prioritizing what needs to get done before the end of day. We're careful not to overbook ourselves too. We know that we're only

as good as our last meeting or event and want each client to feel like our only client! We're also a great team, so we take care of each other and jump in when we need to help each other.

Focus: You note on your website that Events North prides itself on ethical behavior and honesty. Why is transparency so important, not only in the events industry, but for all small businesses?

Beers: When I started in the industry on the East Coast, I found out quickly that the "industry norm" is to mark up all expenses 30 percent or more. I hated it the whole time. I felt like I spent more time hiding true cost for the companies that I worked for, and I didn't like the feeling of not having an open and honest conversation with my clients about what was most important to them about the meeting or event.

When I started my business, I chose to operate differently than some of my peers. I pass all costs directly through to our client as well as any discounts that vendors want to provide us. I am a Rotarian and have been for 11 years now. When I joined, I felt like I knew I was in the perfect place when I read the Four Way Test, which is a nonpartisan and nonsectarian ethical guide for Rotarians to use for their personal and professional relationships. All Rotarians vow to live by these four things.



Allison Beers

Of the things we think, say or do:

1. Is it the TRUTH?
2. Is it FAIR to all concerned?
3. Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS?
4. Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned?

Focus: How do you balance your time between running the business and actually doing the work the business requires?

Beers: On non-event days, I walk out the door at 5 pm to go home to be the best mom and wife that I can be. With that said, I do come in early sometimes to get work done. I'm blessed to be married to a banker that handles all invoicing, taxes, payroll, yearly projections, etc. That takes a huge chunk off my plate so that I can focus on what I'm best at – planning meetings and events and developing new business.

Focus: In what ways has striving for zero-waste events impacted your business?

Beers: This has been huge! When I started my business, I was planning all of the events that took place during the Traverse City Film Festival. After my second year doing the events, I was frustrated that we were producing so much waste. A friend of mine was launching a business when I started mine that was going to help make recycling easier.

I asked if he would work on the film festival events. The first year that I had them help with the events, we reduced our waste from a dumpster to a single, very small bag of trash. Bay Area Recycling for Charities (BARC) has exploded since then, and we've both grown together. It's been great to have such an amazing partner to make the work easy and really, a no-brainer! Since starting the company,

recycling has just become commonplace and part of everything we do. I don't know what I would do without BARC though.

Focus: If a fellow small business owner said she was having a hard time delegating responsibilities to her employees, what would your advice be?

Beers: Since I was a child, I have been a delegator. I know I could not have grown my business without recognizing that I should be the one to do the things that ONLY I can do and delegate the rest. It's hard to delegate a fun thing, but I like to remember that it's a fun thing for my employees to work on too. I am fully aware that I can't do everything myself, and I love to watch my team grow and learn by taking on new tasks and projects.

Focus: How do you host an unforgettable event when there's concern about the budget?

Beers: Budget has little effect on an unforgettable event. A well-run event on a small budget can outshine a big budget event. Timing, execution and planning can make up for small budgets. But big budgets can bring lots of bells and whistles that make you look shiny and fun too!

Focus: What is the most important aspect of your SBAM membership, and why do you think other small business owners should join?

Beers: I have delegated keeping up to speed on issues that impact my small business to SBAM. I cannot stress enough how much weight has been lifted by delegating that responsibility to them. And I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting new vendors and colleagues through SBAM, in my industry and in other industries as well. – **SBAM**

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Bona Van Dis is the editor of Focus.

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The graphic features a circular logo for the 2016 SBAM Annual Golf Outing with two golf clubs and the year '2016'. A yellow starburst highlights the 'NEW LOCATION' text. The background is a scenic view of a golf course under a blue sky with clouds.