

Special Events

By Tara Marion

Special events have to come off without a hitch to be successful. For businesses that specialize in planning them, events run so smoothly that attendees don't even pause to consider the tremendous effort that went into planning even the smallest detail.

ShowSpan Inc. in Grand Rapids produces consumer shows at DeVos Place and venues in other markets, which include the West Michigan Home & Garden Show, the Grand Rapids Boat Show, the Grand Rapids Sport, Fishing & RV Show, the Michigan International Auto Show and the West Michigan Golf Show and attract thousands of attendees.

Consumer shows are designed to let entrepreneurs meet many potential customers for a brief period of time face to face. Bringing them together in a single location for a consumer show is the job of Henri Boucher, vice president and show producer at ShowSpan.

"Booking an event such as these involves reserving the facility, renewing and selling exhibit space, laying out the floor plan, designing and implementing an ad campaign, troubleshooting operational problems, moving in, running the show and coordinating a number of other behind-the-scene activities. It's a very full-time job for all of us," said Boucher of himself, his fellow vice president and show producer, Mike Wilbraham, and 13 other employees.

ShowSpan operates five of its 15 consumer shows at DeVos Place, and exhibitors appreciate the state-of-the-art facility, Boucher said.

According to a Web site that highlights its features, DeVos Place is a 162,000-square-foot Class A exhibition hall with 12 enclosed loading docks. It has lighting and ceiling heights that range from 37 to 72 feet—for exhibitors at the boat show, those ceiling heights are critical.

"Being able to put the mast into the air to show the sails really adds a lot of drama," Boucher said.

The convention business has a huge impact on western Michigan, Boucher said. Take the Grand Rapids Boat Show as an example. Boat sales not only affect the dealer that sells the boat but also the service center that preps the boat, the insurer who insures the boat and the storage facility that stores the boat.

While ShowSpan's employees are experienced in all aspects of consumer show contracting, Roxanne Bruce, conference services manager at **Brook Lodge Hotel & Conference Resort** in Augusta hosts a variety of events from weddings and parties to corporate meetings and brainstorming sessions.

Brook Lodge was once the summer home of Dr. W.E. Upjohn, founder of the Upjohn Co. in Kalamazoo. The 40-acre campus, now owned by **Michigan State University**, is a full-service conference center with the flexibility to serve groups from two to 200, according to Bruce.

With more space and more custom features than a traditional hotel, Bruce said Brook Lodge offers a wide range of amenities and services. Meals and desserts are prepared by on-staff chefs.

Among the many outdoor activities for guests are a driving range and putting green and courts for tennis, basketball and volleyball.

Located among 637 acres of woodland with a pond, Japanese garden and walking paths, Bruce said the best part about Brook Lodge is the setting.

“It’s very peaceful, and it’s a good place because it’s nice and quiet. People have a special occasion and they want to celebrate, or they need to get away and get some work done—it works both ways,” she added.

When a visit to Brook Lodge is business related, there are two buildings with tables and chairs for standard meeting space and an auditorium. For those who take a more experiential approach to learning, **Crux Move Consulting** can be called on to work on building effective leaders, followers and high-functioning teams through an organizational development program.

Crux Move’s on-site facility includes a secluded ropes course and multiple initiative sites.

Guests of Brook Lodge are often repeat customers who already know what the resort has to offer. The job of generating new business is left to one on-site salesperson and four salespeople in East Lansing, who are responsible for new inquiries and business research at both Brook Lodge and **Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center** at MSU, Brook Lodge’s sister hotel.