

Tips on Using Valet Parking

By Alexandra Gudmundsson



Wigged out: Valet dress as Andy Warhol to carry an event's theme.

Women teetering in high heels, events staged in barns a mile down a dusty road ... special events aren't prime for self-parking. Event planners say valet parking is often a sensible event component when handled professionally. "It is part of the way I like to pamper my guests," says Timot McGonagle, head of TimotArt in Nashville, Tenn. "I consider valet parking not just a practical part of the event but part of the entire theatrical experience that I create." Read on to see how professional parkers can make a party perfect.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Matt Iravani, vice president of special events for Los Angeles-based Quality Parking Service, notes that valet parking serves as important bookends to events: "Our motto is that valet parking is the first impression and the final touch," he says. Marley Majcher, "boss" of the Party Goddess in Pasadena, Calif., agrees. "You can have a fabulous party with Elton John personally handing out goody bags, but if

guests have to wait for their car for an hour, forget it," she says. "They are ticked."

Valet parking also sets an elegant tone. "The most immediate benefit of having valet parking at an event is the prestigious image," says Bijan Eghtedari, president of Park One in Miami. Alison Silcoff of Montreal-based Alison Silcoff Events seconds that opinion; she counts on valet parking to add its cachet to her annual Daffodil Ball benefiting the Canadian Cancer Society. Because the Daffodil Ball's guests pay as much as \$50,000 for a table, "Expectations are correspondingly high," Silcoff says. "These guests would not be happy if they had to wait even two or three minutes once they arrive at the event site." So Silcoff hires many valets to minimize the wait — and adds an extra treat at the end of the night. "When the guests leave, there is an inevitable delay of a few minutes," she notes. "So freshly carved smoked meat sandwiches are served in the waiting lobby. In spite of having enjoyed a five-course gourmet dinner, nearly every guest enjoys a sandwich."

DRESS TO IMPRESS

Because valets are the first part of the event guests see, costumed parkers can set an event's tone straightaway. "We've done everything from hula parties where [the valets] are wearing Hawaiian shirts to a casino night where they were dressed like gangsters," Iravani says. But nothing compares to the time a client asked Iravani if the parking attendants could wear tutus. The idea was nixed, as "Wearing them is one thing, but driving in them is another," Iravani says.

San Francisco-based Soiree Valet Parking Service had its employees add capes to their usual attire for a Halloween event. And at the San Francisco Modern Ball in May, which was themed to '60s pop artist Andy Warhol, "Sixty valets were lined up along Third Street in San Francisco," Soiree's president Jamie Dyos says. "And the event planner had all of the valets dress in black and wear white wigs."

Dressed up or dressed down, tidy valets are essential. "Make sure [the valets] wear a common uniform and that it is cleaned, pressed and neat-looking — that includes their shoes," says Mona Meretsky, CSEP, president of Fort Lauderdale, Fla.-based Comcor Event and Meeting Production.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Sometimes valet parking is indispensable due to a lack of available parking. As Greg Jenkins of Long Beach, Calif.-based Bravo Productions points out: "Examples include ground-breaking events where a parking structure or a designated lot may not yet be in place."

"Many warehouses or event spaces do not have adequate parking and necessitate valets," says Andrea Michaels, president of Sherman Oaks, Calif.-based Extraordinary Events. She cites a recent event her team produced on a pier in San Francisco. "There was no public parking. Valet [parking] was necessary for over 1,000 cars."

Both planners and valet parking companies cite the twisting roads of the Hollywood Hills in Los Angeles as the cause of major traffic headaches. "We did an event in the Hollywood Hills, and it was a logistical nightmare," Majcher says. The party went on thanks to a fleet of valets who steered the cars to safe spots on the narrow, curving streets. Sometimes having someone park for guests simply saves the day — Silcoff points out, "In bad weather, valets are especially valuable."

PARKING SUCCESS

Here are some parking do's to keep special events running smoothly:

- **"Do** be nice and provide your valets with heaters, bottled water and chairs. They'll give you better service if they are not freezing and parched with swollen feet."
Carolyn Arthurs, All About Events, New Orleans and Los Angeles
- **"Do** use valets when inviting high-end executives or other dignitaries to your event."
Diana Harris, Glorious Events, Atlanta
- **Do** have the valets open and close the car doors. "When the valet does not open all doors when there are several people getting into a car, it is rather insulting. It is also insulting when they don't close the doors." *Stacy Stern, CSEP, The Special Events Group, Boca Raton, Fla.*
- **"Do** remember that 80 percent of your guests will arrive for a dinner within a 15-minute time period."
Alison Silcoff, Alison Silcoff Events
- **"Do** hire a well-established, reputable company; place your order well in advance."
Alain Ikombo, Atlantic Services Group, Washington

RESOURCES

Alison Silcoff Events
514/932-7517
www.alisonsilcoff.com

All About Events
New Orleans:
504/866-8448
Los Angeles:
323/401-2457
www.allaboutevents.net

Atlantic Services Group
202/466-5050
www.asgpark.com

Bravo Productions
562/435-0065
www.bravoevents-online.com

Comcor Event and Meeting Production
954/491-3233
www.comcorevents.com

Extraordinary Events
818/783-6112
www.extraordinaryevents.net

Glorious Events
770/455-6600
www.gloriosevents.net

Park One
305/891-1670
www.park1.com

Quality Parking Service
800/286-7275
valetparking.com

Soiree Valet Parking Service
800/660-1906
www.soireevalet.com

The Party Goddess!
323/341-7000
www.thepartygoddess.com

The Special Events Group
561/988-3900
www.thespecialeventsgroup.com

TimotArt
615/780-2918
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