

The art of planning

By Ryan Szporer
The Suburban

When Jennifer Lopez starred in *The Wedding Planner* back in 2001, the character and lifestyle she portrayed on screen was about as close as it comes to that of a real wedding planner, except for one small thing — there's a lot more work and a lot less time for laughs.

"It's like everything else," says Daniela Caputo of Daniela Caputo Event Management.

"You have to build a reputation. You have to build a portfolio. I'm always on the go. I'm never home, because I'm always promoting myself."

Danielle Bitton of Seal Productions, a local "event architect" in her own right, has been in the event planning business with her husband Raphy Benbaron for 25 years. That doesn't make her schedule any less hectic. Weddings, she says, are one of her main services but she says the husband and wife team plans every-

thing in between, from fundraisers to corporate events.

"We decorated a lounge for Hydro Quebec for the unveiling of a machine to change high-tension cables that they presented to the government of China," says Bitton of one particular job her company handled around 15 years ago.

"They asked us to make a draping all around this robot that was maybe 20 feet high to be opened upon the presentation. That was one of our strangest demands in décor."

Caputo, who works out of Laval and around the island of Montreal, began climbing the industry's ladder in customer service and marketing. As a planner,



she has helped coordinate many events from birthday parties to fashion shows to fundraisers.

Often, fashion shows work as fundraisers, and last March, Caputo organized one for the Tabitha Foundation of Canada, a group dedicated to improving the living conditions of poverty-stricken people in Cambodia.

The event was an example of a professional planner's a la carte service where they are asked to handle specific duties in addition to a complete-service package. At the fashion show, she was responsible for handling sponsorship and transporting materials when needed. At a Greek

See Planning, page 22

Planning, from page 18

wedding taking place later this month, she will spend the day making sure everything "goes smoothly" while the actual event planner relaxes.

"Sometimes on the day of the event it's people's nerves, they're not in control, you have to stay cool, calm, make sure everything is good, stay on top of things."

Bitton agrees and says success lies in making sure you know that you're giving the customer exactly what they're asking for.

"There is always a need on the part of the customer," she says. "It's always to show who the event is for. If it's a wedding, of course the bride and groom want to show who they are, what they represent. If it's a fundraiser for a hospital, the hospital wants to show what they are working toward. It's always the same pattern."

A similar approach applies to event

planning for different cultural settings. Over the years, Bitton has organized several multi-cultural events, including some in city's Italian and Greek communities. For her part Caputo will continue to diversify her event portfolio along with her knowledge of various cultures. "I would love to do a bar mitzvah. I've been to a few as a guest, not as a planner. I'm of an Italian background and we throw big parties. We enjoy food. We enjoy the company and we like to enjoy ourselves. The bar mitzvah and the Jewish weddings I've gone to were fun. It was great. It reminded me of what we do as Italians when we celebrate."

Through it all, Caputo's goal remains the same: customer satisfaction.

"A lot of people say it must be glamorous. It is glamorous," she says. "But what I enjoy most is when the client is happy because it's their party, not mine. I'm just there to help them out." ☺