



MEMORABLE EVENTS

A sampling of successful events from metro-area meeting and event designers.

By Katie Harholdt

P

lanners, producers, and designers have gone to extraordinary lengths to provide businesses with events that create excitement and strengthen clients' brands. The following four events show the range of local event-planners' talents and capabilities.

Spam Museum Jam 2006

Venue:

The Spam Museum, Austin

Attendees:

15,000 Spam lovers

Rental company:

Après Party and Tent Rental

Entertainment:

Pat Frederick Productions (music), Xelias Aerial Performance Company (aerialists), Moore Fun (moon jumps), North American Carousel (rides), Minnesota Zoo, Silly Sisters (craft activities)

Audio-visual and lighting:

EventPro, Damron Production Services (video production)

Catering:

Hormel Foods, Greek Gourmet, Austin Rotary Club, Morning Grind, A&W

Event planner:

Cookie Coleman and Char Mason through the Cookie Coleman Company

● It may be easier to describe what didn't happen than what did at the 2006 Spam Museum Jam, an annual one-day event to celebrate the history of the popular canned meat. "The challenge was to create a Spam Jam event that tips its hat to the rich history of Hormel and the city of Austin, but had enough of the craziness and fun of prior Spam Jams to delight attendees and promote the Spam Museum and Hormel Foods," says Cookie Coleman owner of the Minneapolis-based Cookie Coleman Company, which planned the event along with Char Mason. Coleman and Mason were charged with differentiating this Spam Jam, billed as "an event of historic proportions," from Austin's other sesquicentennial activities held over the Father's Day weekend last June.

**SPECIAL FOCUS
MEETINGS, EVENTS & CONVENTIONS**

Coleman and Mason worked with Spam Museum Director Shawn Radford, who told them at the outset of planning, "If you build it, they will come." Based on Spam Jam attendance numbers from the past, Radford felt the event team could expect a similar turnout.

The 2006 Spam Jam took on a vintage circus feel that embraced the history of the product with a bit of antique glitz, Coleman says. Bright colors predominated with circus-themed backdrops painted by Sasha Thayer, a Minneapolis-based set designer, and colorful tents set up in the museum parking lot by *Après Party and Tent Rental*.

The event included favorite festival activities such as a talent show for local residents, face painting, a mechanical bull, a kids' Ferris wheel, and a high-striker game provided by Moore Fun. Music and a main-stage tent

with seating for 2,000, tumbling workshops, and aerial artists added to the circus-like feel. The Minnesota Zoo brought an entourage of reptiles and snakes in the Zoomobile. Also on hand, of course, were samples of a variety of Spam favorites, including Spamburgers, Spam fajitas, and pancakes and Spam.

The 2005 Spam Jam, which Coleman's company also planned, celebrated Father's Day by featuring famous TV fathers: Jim Belushi, who stars on *According to Jim*, Tom Bosley, who played Mr. Cunningham on the 1970s sitcom *Happy Days*, and Kurtwood Smith, who played Red Forman on *That '70s Show*. Jim Belushi and the Sacred Heart Band, along with The Smothers Brothers, provided

A young Spam fan mimics one of the circus-themed backdrops at the Spam Museum Jam 2006.



The Xelias performers included acrobats and a fire eater (left). Kids enjoyed making crowns in Spam's signature blue and yellow (right).



the headlining music.

"Working with national talent can be tricky," Coleman says. "You are dealing with an agent until the artist arrives in town. The artist may or may not have agreed to all of the terms of the contract. Quite often this requires special care and handling."

One of the most memorable moments at the 2005 event took place off stage. "The Smothers Brothers kept asking us

to take them to the kitchen to sample the many different kinds of Spam because they loved it," Coleman says. "They had been in the service and had fond memories. They said they always looked for it when they received their rations." Although Spam was introduced in 1937, the product gained popularity with U.S. troops serving in World War II. During the war, Hormel provided 15 million cans of Spam to servicemen each week.