



*Marcia Lyons, General Manager of the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre*

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It was just another day at the office for Henry Kee, one of seven Event Managers who routinely make miracles happen at the Calgary TELUS Convention Centre (CTCC). Planners for a major international association had called him with an oddball request: to kick off their yearly convention, they wanted their president to ride the length of a CTCC ballroom on the broad back of a gleaming white charger. Kee hung up the phone, exhaled deeply, and buckled down to work.

“We had to find a gentle horse and go through quite a bit of health clearance to set things up,” he explains today. “But the organizers got their wish.” It’s one reason why Kee and his colleagues on the CTCC Event Management team get a kick out of coming to work each morning. Dull moments are few and far between.



*Event Management Team*

Looking for more examples?

For an Alberta Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society (STARS) fundraiser, the presence of a full sized working helicopter was required in Exhibition Hall CDE. But it wouldn’t fit through the doors of the loading dock. Solution: mechanics dismantled the chopper and reassembled it on the conference floor.

For a recent Ralph Klein Roast, events staff had to scramble to fulfill another special request: a fleet of bicycles built for two, to be ridden into the banquet hall by head table guests and VIPs.

Prior to an onsite Alice Cooper concert, CTCC employees were disconcerted by rumours that the aging rocker planned to include a large snake in his act. To the relief of all, the show went off without a hitch, 100 per cent reptile free.

“This is a great career for those who genuinely like working with people,” enthuses Tammy Dowell, one of two Event Managers who coordinated CTCC’s contributions to the sprawling G8 Summit of 2002. “It’s never monotonous, that’s for sure. Every event is different,” she grins. “That makes every day an extremely interesting challenge, as well as a daily learning experience.”

Led by Chris Smith, CTCC’s Director of Event Management, this cohesive team, anchored by seasoned professionals such as

Dowell and Kee, stands at the very heart of the Convention Centre’s day to day operational model. Once the CTCC sales group has initiated arrangements for a business meeting, trade show, Christmas party, arts and crafts market or convention, the Event Managers move in and take over, carefully guiding their clients through every planning detail for the upcoming conference.

First, they listen attentively to the needs and wishes of the customers. They help them to connect with external suppliers and CTCC’s partner hotels; lend an experienced hand with room set ups and audio visual requirements; and prepare an event plan which spells out every particular minute detail.

“In a real sense, our Event Managers and our three Catering Managers act as coaches and teachers. Many clients have limited experience in booking a meeting,” says team leader Smith, a well rounded service pro who absorbed the finer points of the hospitality industry during a lengthy stint with a respected international hotel chain. “That’s why we spend so much time evaluating their needs and making recommendations,” Smith adds. “We want to ensure that each group has access to the most appropriate space, the best decorations and the most efficient audio visual systems for the size and nature of the function.”

During 2005, Smith and his team coordinated over 850 events of various sizes at the CTCC, a modern and fully equipped gathering place (132,000 square feet) which can be readily configured to accommodate the most specialized needs. By August of this year, the group was well ahead of that brisk pace, on track for a record shattering year.

“In any given month, each of us might be coordinating 20 separate events. We have to switch gears all the time. This job is the definition of multi tasking,” smiles Henry Kee.

That’s why a good Event Manager combines the skills of a master facilitator with the courteous manners of a polished Maitre D’, the improvisational skills of a jazz musician and the logistical genius of a circus ringmaster. In this business, you have to be adept at thinking on your feet.

“Relationship building is extremely important in our industry,” elaborates Dowell.

“We have a solid Event Management team here and we care about our clients, whether they’re coming in for a small meeting or a convention of 1,500 delegates.”

Customer service is fundamental, the key to CTCC’s success. And customer loyalty is the reward. “I’ve been dealing with many of my customers for more than 10 years,” she confirms. “We’ve developed very strong ties.”

So whether they’re helping the U.S. Secret Service conduct security sweeps in advance of a speech by ex President Bill Clinton or simply scheduling a private board meeting to the satisfaction of a junior energy company, CTCC Event Managers get to the heart of the matter - with horses and helicopters optional.