



TEN TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CATERER

- 1) **Look for a caterer that is licensed and insured in your city.** They should have a city-permitted kitchen for you to visit and inspect upon request.

“The Lake Elmo Inn has been catering for over 25 years and holds a current catering permit, liquor license, and full liability insurance for catering in the Twin Cities and surrounding areas. All of these documents can be produced for you upon request. We house a licensed kitchen that was designed specifically for catering in our Event Center and this is where we prepare and stage all events. We welcome the opportunity to give full tours of our facility, including the kitchen and service areas.”

- 2) **Ask your potential caterer if they have catered weddings before.** There are special nuanced methods that go into planning a wedding that an experienced pro can help provide. Many caterers provide wedding planning inclusive of their service. You buy the menu; they help with the entire production as a planner. They can act as your wedding hosts.

“The Lake Elmo Inn Event Center provides Event Coordinators who have had many years of experience in planning weddings. They are there to help guide you through the planning process. Our Coordinators will provide guidance in planning your menu, linen and china needs, layout of your reception space, timeline of your day, decoration ideas, as well as their personal experience and involvement in hundreds of weddings. This service is complimentary to our clients when the services are purchased through us. We also provide a Banquet Captain for every party who will supervise your reception and follow your plan to the letter.”

- 3) **Preview an event portfolio.** Pictures speak a thousand words about style and execution. Do their pictures look like the event you imagine?

“Our Event Coordinators will show you dozens of photographs of events we have catered, both at our Event Center and at other locations, over many years. We feel that it is important that you know what our product is going to look like. Whether you choose a beautiful plated dinner, platters of family style fare, or even food stations, you can be confident that we will always do our best to make your dining experience memorable.”

- 4) **Never be afraid to ask a caterer for a list of previous clients or references and phone them.** Your questions might include: Was the caterer on time? Were you happy with the service? Would you hire this caterer



again? Was the food as wonderful as they promised? Was the final bill what you agreed upon?

“Many cards, letters, and photographs that have been sent as a “Thank you” to our staff hang on a wall in the Event Center service hall awaiting your inspection. We are happy to provide you with contact information for these past clients with their permission. Even simply reading many of them will show you how they felt about our services. In addition, you can find comments about the Lake Elmo Inn Event Center catering services on local websites, such as The Knot.”

- 5) **Request a tasting of the caterer’s menu or recommendations.** If they ask for a tasting fee, it could be money well spent. Decide now if their food meets your expectations, and don’t wait for the big day to receive an unpleasant surprise. If you like what you see and taste, ask about customizing a package to fit your needs. If the menu you love comes with side dishes that aren’t quite what you had in mind, or you don’t think you’ll need the caterers to act as servers, ask. Many caterers will provide a drop-off, customized food service. All the food should arrive fully or partially cooked with reheating instructions.

“At the Lake Elmo Inn Event Center, custom meals are our business. We will work closely with you to review our menus and are happy to create custom dishes that may have special meaning to your family and friends. Service can be provided at any level you desire. Whether you wish to serve a simple drop-off meal or a full service plated dinner, we’ll help you design your offerings to fit your needs. With a paid deposit, a tasting is complimentary to help you get exactly what you are looking for out of your dining experience.”

- 6) **Be honest with the caterer about your budget from day one.** Most caterers will work to meet their clients in the middle. If you want to ask for a discount on a particularly pricey item, do so, or ask the caterer’s opinion on ways to cut back. Ask the caterer for a breakdown of each item; then, if you feel you can supply the flowers cheaper, do so.

“The Lake Elmo Inn Event Center publishes our prices online so there is no question as to the cost of our products and services. Catering companies have the reputation that they will not reveal pricing so they can charge different amounts from one client to another. You can view all of our prices on our website, anytime. Our policy is to “provide the best value you can find”, so although we may not be the least expensive, we will provide you with the best experience for each dollar spent. The average dinner catered with us will cost approximately \$40 to \$45 per guest final cost. If you are comfortable with this range, we are happy to guide you through your planning process and can include full service, full linens and china, and award-winning food.”



- 7) **If the budget seems an insurmountable problem, ask your caterer if you may supply some of the food items.** Their concern will be product liability insurance, meaning they can't be held responsible for food they didn't make. If it's important to you, agree that you will provide your own insurance. You provide your fabulous stuffed mushrooms, and your caterer handles the entrée. Anything can be settled with the right attitude.

"Although the Lake Elmo Inn Event Center does not allow food to be brought into the center, we are happy to work with you on incorporating one of your family favorites into the meal we provide at off-site locations. We will ask you to provide us with liability insurance on your food items as we provide you with insurance on ours. Additional staff may be required to accommodate the additional offerings."

- 8) **Ask for a contract, and make sure you understand it.** There may be a per-slice cake-cutting fee and overtime for wait staff if they stay beyond a prearranged time. Some caterers specify that a guest count can go up, but not down. This means that if you told the caterer that one hundred guests are coming but only seventy-five show up, then you are still going to be charged for the full hundred. If, on the other hand, you tell the caterer that you are expecting another ten guests the day before the party, you will be charged for these extra guests. These fees are usually not applied until your final invoice.

"From the day your deposit is paid, a contract is provided for you that will be signed by both you and a representative of the Lake Elmo Inn Event Center. This contract will grow as we plan, outlining the details of your reception as they are arranged, including date, location, timeline, menu, service style, staffing, bartending needs, decorations, etc. All items will be priced in a clear and concise manner as shown on our published menu selections. The policy of the Lake Elmo Inn Event Center is that a final guest count must be provided three days prior to your reception day. It is at this point we will not lower the guest count as the food will have been ordered and is being prepped in-house by this time. Although it is discouraged to increase your count after this time, many of the menu items can possibly be increased a bit until the day before. We do not have an extra charge for many additional services, such as cake cutting, and staffing is charged an hourly rate outlined in our menu that does not change with length of time needed at the event site."

- 9) **Plan on bringing the caterer any necessary phone numbers or contracts.** Like the baker who is responsible for the cake or the party rental company that will be delivering the tables and chairs. If there are any last-minute problems, it's best to let the caterer handle them if possible; your caterer likely knows every vendor in town, and can smooth out the typical snags much more efficiently than you can. Make sure your caterer is aware of everything that will be going on: deliveries, decorations, and friends and family who have volunteered to help.



“The Lake Elmo Inn Event Center will make these arrangements for you, if you desire, and include them on our bill to you for an additional 18% service charge on the cost of the outside services. But even if you make these arrangements yourself, it can be beneficial to share these arrangements with us. Although it can be difficult for us to anticipate some of the small reception details, such as musicians, flowers, etc., unless we’ve been directly involved in those planning meetings as well, we will be staging our services at the same time as they are staging theirs so if we have a general idea on your plan, we can be a second set of eyes for you. We will be aware if all the tables have a centerpiece or the chairs have a cover. We are more likely to notice if something is amiss. In addition, it is wise to have a professional review your lists of furnishings, china and linen needs, decorations, and anything else that will be coordinated into your reception to make sure all the details will be covered that day and things will flow along smoothly.”

- 10) **Remember the guest count is what will drive up the cost of your wedding.** Is it more important to you to have 150 people for cheese and crackers, or 50 for a sit-down dinner of steak and champagne? You decide. Whatever you decide, an experienced caterer has done it all before, and can likely offer you some of the best of both.

“The Lake Elmo Inn Event Center Coordinators will be the first to tell you if your choice of menu is appropriate for your reception plans. If you are inviting guests over the dinner hour and they expect to eat dinner, we will be sure to help you provide what is necessary, and hopefully no more than that. In addition, if you are looking to have “light hors d’oeuvres”, we will encourage you to make this clear to your guests in advance.

This list was found in a book called *do it for less weddings* by Denise Vivaldo and we feel it provides a thorough collection of common concerns people have when they need to hire a caterer. The Lake Elmo Inn Event Center welcomes these questions so you can be confident in your catering choice and how the process should work for you. Our responses are below each question in italics and should provide you with a clear understanding of how we operate. Give us a call at 651-779-5994 today.