

Parties And Events

Section Notes

Many years ago there were only a few large shag parties, and they were scattered throughout the year. Now there are roughly 100 shag clubs, and there are usually several parties to choose from every weekend. In addition, the A.C.S.C. Internet web site gives everyone the opportunity to find out about most all of these parties. This also means that potential guests have choices. It is up to the host club to make their party appealing if they expect to attract attendees. Some of the older, and more successful parties have continued to prosper due to hard work, planning, and good advertising. Whether you are hosting a one night, four hour party, or a full weekend event, here are some things that might help you when planning or hosting your own parties:

Parties And Events

Initial Decisions

What is going to be the duration of the event? Is it a one, two or three day party? The answer will affect almost all of the decisions you will have to make. If you don't have a big club, or much support, or if this is your first big party, one day is probably best.

Scheduling your party is also very important. Look at what other activities and events are held around the time you want to have your party. Try to avoid other major shag club parties, and anything that may be held in your local area at the same time. If you plan to make this an annual event, keep in mind the dates of other yearly parties. You can't always avoid every event, but you can make smart choices that will help you draw a bigger crowd.

Motels

If you are going to have to use a motel facility for the party, you will also need to find out which one who will work with you best on food, drinks, and other items. Also, make sure you have a sufficient number of rooms available. Remember, many shaggers are more concerned with price of motel rooms than which motel their room is in. This is because they will probably not spend much time in their room. After you choose one to use for your event, make sure they do not offer any bigger discounts. It can be embarrassing to find out that the motel offers some "super saver" rate that is lower than what you are offering on your flyer! If you plan to offer a choice of motels, list them on your flyer in your order of priority. If there is one motel that is the "party headquarters", make sure you can tell that from information on your flyer.

Party Location

You may want to use the motel as your party location. This has the advantage of eliminating the need for transportation to the party. The motel may also be willing to offer you their ballroom for free. But, using a motel for your party location tends to drive up the price of the event and limit your catering and other options.

If you select another location for the actual party, you may be able to save a lot of money and include more free stuff (food, drinks, etc.) in the party. You may also be able to offer a lower ticket price. But, using something other than a lounge or motel ballroom may also require more man-hours of work from your members if you have to staff a registration area, bar, and other committees. Regardless of the location you select, try to ensure there is plenty of dance floor space, and sufficient fresh air, heating or air conditioning.

DJ's

With so many parties, there is some competition for guests. Your DJ selection can be the determining factor of whether or not people come to your event. Consider the geographic area and the shag clubs that you hope to draw from, and then evaluate the ability of different DJ's to attract and satisfy the musical taste of that group. If you can afford it, and your party is long enough, hire multiple DJ's. That way if some people do not like one of your DJ choices, your other choice(s) may be more to their liking.

While it is always nice to pick a DJ that is in your club, this can also kill your event if he is unknown. How many times have you seen a party flyer with a DJ listed that you didn't know or that was unpopular? Chances are you did not attend that event! If you do use a "club" DJ, you may be able to also offer a more well known DJ during "prime time".

Similar decisions have to be made if you plan to have a band at your event. In many cases, a band will allow you to attract more people who may not be "die hard" shaggers, or who don't even know a shag club exists in your area. This can be a big draw.

A DJ will be much cheaper, and may offer more songs at speeds suitable for dancing. You have to decide whether a DJ or a band is more suitable for the crowd you want to attract to your event.

Party Price And Value

A good party value can be a major draw. Think of your party more as an opportunity to showcase your club, and to show your guests a good time. Set a goal of breaking even or just making a small profit. Chances are you will make more money than you expect if your party is a good one. This could happen immediately (because more people attend than you expect, or they buy a lot of raffle tickets) or it could happen the following year (based on the reputation of this year's party).

If you have a history of similar events, you probably know about how much you should have to charge to break even or make a profit. If not, you have many party expenses to consider before determining a price. Don't overprice your event for what you are offering. Too many clubs look at parties as "get rich quick" opportunities. But, no one likes paying too much for anything they buy (especially shaggers). Overprice your event, and your guest will never forget it.

If your event includes a meal, or will last more than one day, decide whether or not you plan to offer discounts to people who arrive late, or only attend one day of the event.

You may want to offer a discount to those who preregister. A five dollar discount is about average for tickets ranging from \$25-\$40. Some more expensive events may offer bigger discounts, or a staggered schedule of discounts depending on when tickets are ordered.

Flyers And Advertisement

When sending flyers to shag clubs, make sure to send them out well in advance. Many clubs only check their mail every few weeks. Also, they may not publish their newsletter every month. You need to have your flyer in their hands well before your party to have any chance that they will reproduce it in their newsletter, or hand it out at their meeting. Three or four months advance notice is about a minimum for large events.

Clubs are swamped with flyers from different clubs and organizations. Make yours attractive to the editor by providing at least a few copies just for him or her. Even if your flyer is a bright color, send a couple on white paper, and in at least two sizes. (Most clubs use either 8.5x11 or 5.5x8.5 inch page size in their newsletter.) Remember, if you send a flyer out that is of poor copy quality, it is going to look even worse when reproduced! Be sure your flyer is readable when reduced, too.

All the vital information about your event should be on one side of a single page. (You can't expect anyone to devote several pages of their newsletter to your flyer.) This includes a map to the location, contact phone number, how to get tickets, how to get motel rooms, etc. Remember that people will be seeking information at all hours of the day. Make sure there is an information avenue available during all hours. Do you have a hotline recording or web site? Put that on your flyer and make sure to keep them updated. As an example, if a motel sells out, make that information available and tell your guests about alternatives. It is also good to have club members take flyers to other parties and events, area shag nights or other gatherings when they go. (There is more information about making flyers in the Newsletter section of this book.)

If you have a radio station that plays our kind of music, see if you can get some free publicity for your event. Don't forget to mention that your club is a non-profit group. You also need to provide details of your event to the www.shagdance.com web site. The Carefree Times is another good place to get your event noticed by the shag crowd.

If your event helps raise funds for charity, local media (newspapers, radio and TV) may be willing to offer free publicity. Take advantage of all opportunities.

Committees

Depending on the size of the event, and what is included, you may need to establish various committees. Here is a listing of some you may want to create:

Accommodations - Deals with the motels, negotiates room rates, etc.

Bar - Handles all beverages, and obtains permits as needed

Clean-up - Handles clean up during the event (emptying trash, cleaning up spills, etc.) or after the event is over, or both.

Decorations - Handles decorations, signs, posters, etc.

DJ's And Music - Picks and schedules DJ's, bands, etc.

Entertainment - Handles any entertainment you may include

Flyers - Designs the flyer, and helps with distribution (other clubs, past guests, etc.)

Food - Handles food plans, caterers, etc. If you have more than one meal, you may want to break this down into each individual meal.

Hospitality - Handles making guests feel welcome and that they are having a good time. Munchies - Handles popcorn, chips, or other snack type foods you may offer Party Facility - Makes arrangements for location of event

Photography - Takes photos of members and guests for posting at the event, for your newsletter, photo books, or future use.

Raffle - Handles raffles and drawings, door prizes, etc.

Registration - Handles ticket sales (may or may not include pre-registrations)

Setup - Ensures tables, chairs, dance floor, DJ booth, raffle, etc. are all in the right place. Shirts or ? - Handles shirt sales, or whatever items you may offer

Tear Down - This group helps take down tables and chairs, sound equipment, etc. after the event is over.

After you decide what committees you need, appoint committee chairpeople. It is ok to have more than one person chair a committee, especially if your event last more than one day. This allows the chairs to "rotate" times of being responsible. Remember, you need good people to lead your committees. Otherwise, the entire effort may turn out to be less than adequate.

Some large parties have detailed work assignments for each committee. You can make a listing showing the committee, and the things that have to be done by each group before, during, and after the event is over.

Be sure to ask and encourage chairpeople to provide input to your listing as soon as possible after the event is over (while it is still fresh in their minds).

Manpower

Some huge parties (900+ people) have been hosted by a relatively small club (generally around 100 members). That party is very labor intensive since they do everything at our event (even cooking some of the food). They couldn't do this without good planning and organization.

After you have chairpeople, work on the membership support. You may be able to entice your members to support the event by offering discounted tickets, free T-shirts, etc. if they support the event at some minimum level that you establish. One club has about ten different committees for their party. Then, they break their three day event into work slots from 1 1/2 or 2 hours long. They make a big table chart of all the committees and all the times slots and have members sign up for them by writing their name into the slots. Members have to sign up for a certain number of work slots to qualify for the discounts and freebies. (Chairpeople are given exemption from signing up for other items.)

They also do a listing of every person who signed up to help, and what they signed up for. That way a person can go to one list and see what they signed up for, or can go to the other list and see who is supposed to be working a certain area at a certain time. The latter is very helpful to committee chairpeople.

The process of getting people signed up can be time-consuming. But it is an opportunity to encourage members to participate, and it allows them to sign for committees and times slots that they like the best. The peer pressure of the list is good, too. Everyone wants their name on the list so it doesn't appear that they are unwilling to support the club.

One of the toughest jobs to get people do to is cleanup after the event is over. Make sure you have a committee for this. Or, if it is an alternative, consider paying the facility or some outside business to do the cleanup.

Finally, your members have to have the attitude that they are putting on the event for the benefit of the guests, not for themselves. They should feel that it is their obligation to the club to work at the event, and to make sure your guests have a good time. Of course, you do want your own members to have fun. But, not until they have done their fair share of the work.

Building Set-Up

Arrange your room, or your building to have open and easy access to popular spots (the bar, restrooms, etc.), and plenty of dance floor space. People don't like to feel crowded, so watch the spacing of tables and chairs. Leave room to walk between them, even when people are "spreading out" and getting comfortable.

If you have a facility that you use regularly, particularly for yearly events, it may help to take measurements and draw a map of the building showing where key items are, distances between tables, etc. Keep this for future reference.

Just because you have 100 guests at your event, doesn't necessarily mean you have to have 100 chairs and an relative number of tables. The club that has hosted 950 guests uses only 350 chairs. Why? Most people aren't sitting down unless they are resting or eating... and they don't all do that at the same time. In general, people use tables as a place to put their drinks and personal items. Keep that in mind. You may also find you can use smaller or more narrow tables, or that you can eliminate some of them altogether.

Get input from your DJ if there are options of where to put the dance floor or the DJ booth. Sound quality is important, and can be very bad if the DJ has to set up in an unfavorable area.

If you have options of where to put your bar or food areas, try to put them out of the way of normal traffic or dance areas. You may find it good to split up where you put the DJ booth, bar, etc. because it helps keep the crowd dispersed around the room or building instead of having everyone standing around in one spot.

Lighting will never be right for everyone, no matter what level you choose. Someone will always think it is too light or too dark. Pick a level you like and go with it. You can always turn on additional lights when announcing raffle ticket winners, etc.

Shuttles And Transportation

With the emphasis and concern over drinking and driving, it is almost certain that you will have to provide transportation to and from your event if your party is not held in a motel, and you have more than a one night event. The quality of your shuttles can make or break your party. Two of the most important things to keep in mind are the number of vehicles, and the size of the vehicles. Most people don't mind waiting for a vehicle if they are running continuously, and they are big enough to handle the crowd. But show up with an eight passenger vehicle when 20 or 25 are waiting, and then don't come back for another 15 minutes or so and you have already upset your guests before the party even starts. Shuttles can be expensive, but having more than enough service is well worth the money. Be sure to post shuttle schedules, drop off locations, etc. at the motels and the party location.

Giveaways

If you decide to give away free items to everyone who attends (keychains, can huggers, etc.) you may want to consider asking local business for items, or trying to get a sponsor. The Chamber of Commerce or local Tourism Council may be helpful, too. If you do get items or a sponsor, be sure to acknowledge the donation. The easiest way is to post a sign at your event. Also, send a letter of thanks, if the donation is significant.

Items For Sale

If you decide to have one or more items for sale at your event, remember that most guests are bombarded with these types of things at every event. If you buy shirts, huggers or other to sell, order less than you think you can sell. You are better off having some people wanting more, than being stuck with a box full of extras (and a big bill to pay for). It may also help to have more "generic" items, rather than items specific to your club. As an example, you might buy a can hugger that says "shag" on the side of it, but might not buy one with some other shag club's name on it! This is especially important if you have more guests than your own club members at your party.

Raffle Items

Raffle items can be a great source of income, if handled correctly. If you give away cash, great. Everyone likes a 50/50, and the income is pure profit. Plus, you don't have to worry about your raffle income exceeding the cost of the prizes. If you give away items, we suggest no more than two or three. Remember, any time you are raffling off items, the party is STOPPED. Any break in the action is bad, and stops the "flow" of the event. Some of the worst breakdowns ever witnessed at parties took place when a lot of items were given away (most worth \$20 or less) and it took forever. Don't spoil an otherwise great event by boring people with a long drawing. Remember, there will be people waiting who didn't buy any raffle tickets, too. They will be even more anxious for the music to start back up. If you absolutely must give away a lot of things (donations or whatever), consider using them as "door prizes" and post ticket numbers where people can check to see if they have won anything.

Hospitality

People come to an event because they like it, and because they feel welcome. Make people feel wanted and they can come back, even if they don't have a particularly great party experience. If your party runs without you having to use a lot of members manning ticket booths, bars, sales areas, etc., then you need to pay even more attention to hospitality. Nothing is worse than when you have almost no interface with the host club members because they aren't working any committees.

Chain Of Command

Establish a clear chain of command for your event, even if it only communicated to key people. Then, decide what authority committee chairpeople have. As examples, can a person working registration cut the price of a ticket for a "valid" reason? Who can ask an unruly guest to leave the event? Who is allowed to tell the DJ to turn down the music. If there is a disagreement between chairpeople, who makes the decision?

There will be some unexpected issues or problems that arise during your party. Expect that this will happen, and do your best to handle whatever comes up. It's not really the problems that you have to worry about. It is how you respond to them. Make sure your club members know who to go to for various issues or decisions. This cuts down on the response time.

Record Keeping

One of the most important things you can do is keep detailed and accurate records. No detail is too small to record. Keep a manual about your biggest events, and have committee chairs and others provide input. The little things you learn will make you better next time... if you remember them and address them at future events.

We've already mentioned keeping a manual to describe the duties of each committee. This can be very, very detailed. You can also keep other types of records. One of our clubs can tell you everything about past events, from how many rolls of paper towels were used, to how many of each type of drink were given away, etc. They know how much tape was used, where they bought they raffle tickets, how many were sold, etc. No detail is too small to write down. We can't stress enough that even the little tiny things should be recorded.

Consider keeping the following information concerning everything used at the event:

Item used or needed

Where the item was obtained Price paid

Person contacted (if applicable) Quantity
obtained for event

Quantity used

Additional amount that was needed (if applicable)

Be sure to keep track of how many people attended the event. For things like Sunday breakfast on a multi-day event, you will need to know how many people attended that portion of the event when looking back at quantities used or needed.

It is very productive to have a meeting of committee chairs and other interested members immediately after your party. One club's three day event ends early afternoon on Sunday, and they all gather and go out to have a nice meal after finishing their clean up. They go around the table and ask everyone for their feedback about the event, and they write down what is said for future reference. Also, all committee chairs are asked to turn in a written report soon after the event with details about their committee. This includes all the information mentioned previously, as well as what they would change, buy or do differently if they were doing it again. By keeping such accurate details, even if they change chairpeople for the next party, the people in charge know exactly what to do. This is a great security to people who you are trying to entice into being a first-time chairperson.

It also never hurts to ask your guests for feedback. Make it clear that you want any compliments and/or constructive criticisms. One club puts party feedback forms at the exits near the end of most of our major parties. If you get even one good idea that improves your event, it is worth the effort. Plus, it shows your guests that you are genuinely interested in hosting an event that they enjoy. Have an open attitude about whatever you hear from them, too. The nastiest, most rude and ugly feedback form ever received can result in one of your most successful party improvements!

Other Items That You May Want To Consider

- Special Guests Who are "special guests"? Do sponsors, facility owners/managers, well known shaggers, etc. qualify? Are you going to offer special guests free admission, rooms, etc? Are you going to recognize them during the event?
- Area Stores Many may be willing to offer special discounts to their business, or donations to your event in exchange for advertising, or referring your guests to their business.
- Attractions If you have special shopping areas, tourist attractions, scenic tours or other in your area, make that information available to guests.
- Decorations Is there a theme to the party? You may need a separate committee to handle the decorations at your event.
- Special Events If you plan to have golf outings, dance workshops, hospitality rooms, or other attractions, decide how to advertise applicable items and make sure you have the committees or manpower to handle them.
- Security The size, location, facility requirements and other factors relating to your event may require you to use security at your event. Having a security officer can eliminate concerns over disruptive guests. They can also help you discourage people from driving after drinking. It may also help give managers, owners, or local officials more confidence in your event.

Conclusion

No two events are ever the same, and something that works for one club may or may not work for another. Be smart and use your best judgement. But, don't be afraid to seek the advice or input of others who may have more experience than you, or who have the reputation of hosting successful events. A good party is a lot of fun. A bad one leaves a lasting memory.