

# KEEPING IT **REAL**

Whether for business or pleasure, today's events and social gatherings are in sync with changing values and taking on a new dimension.



BY CANDICE MUTSCHLER

The economy, global warming and an overall shift in consciousness have changed the way people party these days. Today's social gatherings are kinder, cozier affairs—still reflecting excellent taste, of course, but boasting half the fat and a smaller carbon footprint.

While glitz and glamour will always have their place—some celebrations warrant nothing less—lavish, over-the-top parties that once were *de rigueur* for every occasion are now the exception. These days, there's a notable narrowing of focus, a return to tradition and a longing for social simplicity.

The trends in everything from home décor to fashion to cuisine reflect this new thinking, and event planners have responded in kind—by creating memorable events that emphasize togetherness, are inspired by nature, and have a sustainable element.

At Longboat Key Club and Resort, this “back to basics” philosophy is embraced fully. Because expectations constantly evolve, we asked Risa Segal, director of conference services, to share some current trends on both the business and social fronts, in an effort to help *Reflections* readers plan their next event.

## **SMALL IS THE NEW BIG**

Segal is seeing an increase in intimate parties that give hosts more opportunity to mingle with guests. While these soirees could take place in a home, the current thinking is to let someone else deal with planning, parking and cleanup—by holding the event at the club. Conversely, many hosts choose to hold events at their homes but arrange for the club's private catering team to handle the logistics. Likewise, intimate weddings—40 guests or fewer—are on the rise. These “destination weddings,” where family and friends join the bride and groom for a celebration lasting several days, allows them to enjoy each other's company and the resort's amenities.

## **GREEN AND HEALTHY**

Increasingly, ecology-minded party planners are demanding environmentally neutral materials and organic cuisine. “We recently did a ‘sustainable table’ [event] with all locally grown food, under a tent on the golf course overlooking the bay,” Segal recalls. “It was all candlelit, and we transported people by solar-powered golf carts. It proved we can do just about anything a guest asks.” Likewise, “green” policies are now an important consideration for many companies reviewing sites for corporate meetings. Longboat Key Club and Resort has been honored repeatedly by the state and county for its environmental efforts.

## **UNEXPECTED VENUES**

Parties don't have to be limited to the ballroom—and that presents opportunities to be creative. The club's marina, beach and new Tennis Gardens complex are innovative party venues, as are several out-of-the-ordinary places such as a canopy of oak trees with hanging lanterns providing light, or the quaint courtyard at the club's Portofino Ristorante. Segal once planned a sumptuous seven-course wine dinner down a stretch of hallway near the tennis pro shop, with a Spanish guitarist enhancing the mood. Segal says parties are limited only by the imagination.

## **FAMILY REUNIONS**

The uncertainty of our times leaves people eager to reconnect and celebrate what's really important. Family reunions are more popular than ever, but they can be difficult to coordinate. Logistically, it helps to have everyone at one location where there is a range of amenities and activities for all ages and interests. And with so much to do at the resort, it's easy to avoid those pesky family dramas.

## **MEETINGS THAT MOTIVATE**

Even as companies worldwide keep a sharper eye on expenses, the leading executives say an off-site meeting is still an effective way to energize employees. A change of scenery and a relaxed, collegial atmosphere can promote innovation and creativity, and do wonders for morale.

At Longboat Key Club and Resort, conference planners work with clients to create memorable business meetings that are good investments and stay within their budgets. Risa Segal, conference services director, says many attendees take advantage of discounted group rates and arrive with their families a few days before, or stay a few days afterwards, to enjoy the amenities at their own expense.

Thanks to its idyllic setting and a full range of amenities—from meeting space to meals, from activities to accommodations—the club has received frequent honors for its business services, including the Pinnacle Award from *Successful Meetings* magazine. The award recognizes the top 1 percent of U.S. meeting venues.

**For information about meeting services, call 800-237-8821 or visit [longboatkeyclub.com](http://longboatkeyclub.com) and follow the Meetings link.**



### RELAXED AND INFORMAL

Plated dinners used to be a party standard—especially at wedding receptions—but Segal is seeing more buffets and food stations, which are less stuffy and promote mingling. She also says people like to be outdoors when possible. “When you hold an event on the pool deck or the beach, the sunset is going to be spectacular,” she says. Likewise, business meetings or conferences set against nature’s backdrop yield remarkably productive work.

### FRUGAL FUNDRAISERS

Fundraisers are now being concisely planned and packaged for maximum success. Organizers are scaling back ticket prices—enticing more attendees—and event planners are creating stunning affairs for less money by nixing things such as expensive throwaway centerpieces in favor of natural freebies such as fishbowls filled with sand and shells. Everybody wins.

