



An eventful life

By Dianne Murphy

As the saying goes, if you want something done right, give it to a busy person. That statement seems tailor-made for Sharon Meyers, director of catering for the National Conference Center, mother of identical twin girls and a tireless volunteer for various area charities and community efforts.

On a balmy September day, Meyers was spotted on the 15th hole at the 1757 Golf Club in Ashburn encouraging Redskins player Mark Moseley to don women's wear for the Driving Miss Daisy Challenge during the Loudoun Education Foundation's golf tournament. By paying \$20, players could hit from the red tees (the women's tees) on a par 5 hole, but they had to play in women's clothing. She got the \$20 from him and from many of the other participants that day to raise \$600 for the foundation. An avid golfer herself, she chatted easily with the participants, even exchanging a few business cards and making notes for possible business in the future.



West Belmont Place at the National Conference Center director of catering Sharon Meyers is the organizer and master of ceremonies behind the scenes whipping up menus, themed galas and stunning weddings throughout the year. Here she poses during a recent tasting luncheon for potential holiday party guests.

Meyers, a 1987 University of Maryland graduate, started college with an interest in cosmetic chemistry. The workings and planning excited her, but the math destroyed her. A self-described people person, she decided to supplement her busy college schedule by working on campus with the catering service in the student union. She was quickly promoted to banquet captain.

Figuring that chemistry was not her ticket to success, she changed her major and created her own study program of food service administration. After college she continued in the food service business with various catering and food related companies, developing

her management skills and learning about the business.

In 1991 as new luxury hotels were entering the marketplace, she joined the elite opening team for the Ritz Carlton in Tysons Corner. Known worldwide for their level of service, Meyers immersed herself in planning grand events, spectacular weddings and business meetings with the top leaders in the county.

Meyers credits her first mentor and boss at the Ritz, Bob Mikolitch, for inspiring her to be creative. She remembers fondly an "Under the Sea" themed event, which transformed the ballroom into an underwater magical vision complete with a mermaid and shipwreck structure in the middle of the ballroom. "Bob really encouraged a collaborative work environment and was always supportive of my ideas," Meyers says. "His creativity was so inspiring and made me want to always go beyond and think outside of the box."

Many who have been involved in the hotel business know that it is a 24/7 work environment, but in 1994 Meyers somehow found time to fall in love with a man named Eliot Meyers. They married and three years later -- while working a very hectic and high profile job -- she gave birth to twins Samantha and Melissa.



Sharon Meyers, director of catering for West Belmont Place at the National Conference Center, shares a stylish moment on the links with Redskins great Mark Moseley at the Driving Miss Daisy Challenge during the Loudoun Education Foundation Golf Tournament.



During the grand opening of West Belmont Place, the guests got into the Mardi Gras theme. Pictured with Meyers are Eileen Curtis, left, president of the Dulles Chamber and Georgia Graves of Bridgeman Communications, Inc.

"When we went for the sonogram at the 20-week mark, I was so excited to see the baby and learn the sex. Imagine our surprise when we discovered that we are actually having twins!" Meyer laughs. "Luckily we were all healthy and I was able to work throughout the pregnancy without even a day of bed rest."

With a mere 8 ½ weeks home with her twins, Meyers, ever the go-getter, jumped right back into the busy life at the Ritz. Now a Loudoun County resident, she commuted back and forth to Tysons. That, paired with late nights and weekend events, took a toll on the family. As luck would have it and with her eye out for opportunities at every stop, she saw a posting for an assistant director of catering job at the Lansdowne Resort, a position that would cement her place in Loudoun County while satisfying her need to create, plan and organize events.



Although the hospitality business can take a toll on family time, Meyers manages her schedule to be with family when it is most important. The twins Samantha and Melissa, recently celebrated their becoming B'not Mitzvah with a Hollywood themed party at West Belmont Place.

It was at Lansdowne that she started her long relationship with another Loudoun resident, Amy Bobcheck. Planning a second wedding, Bobcheck knew that she wanted this one to be different from her first, and while talking with Meyers, was able to translate her vision of what she wanted.

"I knew that I wanted a non-traditional wedding in some sense, and from the very beginning Sharon got the vibe we were trying to create. It was absolutely spot-on perfect, and we have been friends ever since," Bobcheck says. "I admire her out-of-the-box thinking and the fact that she never misses even the smallest detail. For instance, while checking on me during the whirlwind of the wedding day, she (learned) that I had a sore throat and came to my aid with a bottle of Advil. She was so attentive and absolutely saved the day."

In an arena where business and pleasure often mix, the women's relationship has gone from being golfing buddies during networking events, to cheering on the sidelines during their kids' softball games.

When Bobcheck was tasked with planning her daughter's Sweet 16 party, Meyers was called in to pull it together. "In just 10 days, Sharon was able to pull off this amazing party complete with balloon sculptures and flashing lights -- as complex as a wedding but with all the finest details and totally catering to her client. When working with her, I always feel like she is the angel on my shoulder. Her presence is felt and seen, but she is very subtle."



NCC General Manager Kurt Krause knew the minute he met Meyers that she was the person he needed on the West Belmont Place team, once the space was introduced to the Loudoun community. He is her biggest supporter and is pictured at a recent tasting event – an event Sharon created to entice prospective clients to book their business with them.



With only 10 days to plan, Meyers paid attention to the tiniest details to make sure the Sweet 16 party of Amy Bobcheck's daughter was perfect – including a gorgeous cake.

After years of working more long shifts, holidays and endless weekends, it was time for Meyers to take stock of her life and make some changes. The girls were busy with school activities, and basketball and softball continued to be a huge part of the family's life. In 2007, Meyers had a "something's got to give" moment.

Ironically, right next door to Lansdowne, the National Conference Center was deep in planning for a new addition, West Belmont Place, that would bring more than 17,000 sq. ft. of new event space to the county. Kurt Krause, NCC general manager, knew after just minutes of speaking with Meyers that she was the person to introduce it to the county. "Sharon has such a wealth of knowledge about the catering industry, and she has taken this property from events where we served hot dogs and hamburgers in chafing dishes, to serving 10 of the 12 high school proms, galas and ethnic weddings. She is enthusiastic and connected and always expecting more. We are so lucky to have her."

One of Meyers' biggest fans is Tina Johnson, CEO of Johnson Promotions and Events and organizer of the annual Northern Virginia Women's Business Conference held at NCC. "I have had the pleasure to work with Sharon for over 10 years. Her attention to detail is unbelievable! It's rare in the hospitality business to find someone who truly cares about the overall outcome of an event, but Sharon manages her clients' events as if they were her own. I am amazed at how she is able to juggle her career, family life and still have time for her friends. She is a wonderful example of a working woman that has learned to manage the work/life balance!"

But striking that balance has not always been easy for Meyers. She has had to be flexible with both her family and her work activities, and allows that many times her family has taken a backseat to someone else's special occasion, gala or community fundraiser. But true to her nature as an organizer, Meyers has always made sure that the girls were well taken care of -- whether in community daycare, afterschool programs and organized sporting activities, or by juggling schedules with her husband and family members.



Meyers was part of a group that planned the school/business partnership with Belmont Ridge Middle School. The award-winning program is so popular, parents make special requests that their kids be chosen to participate. Part of the school/business partnership 6-week program entails shadowing the banquet department. In fact, the young participants were asked to create interesting centerpieces for the tables at the actual awards banquet. Another aspect of the partnership program involves working with the various departments that come together to make an event happen. At right, the kids get hands-on experience making a dessert during a team-building exercise in the kitchen.

Her move to the National Conference Center has afforded her a schedule that is very flexible, but it has also presented a different business model with its own hurdles. With so many different levels of ballroom space in the surrounding counties, she says she works hard to know what the competition is doing. Her unwaveringly optimistic attitude pushes her through the challenge of selling the property against neighboring 4-star properties.

With the addition of the ballroom in 2007, Meyers says that she was able to be an active participant in giving advice on china, furnishings, even group bookings, and she has added a design room for potential guests and brides to see all of the possibilities they can have for their event. That, as well as actively networking in the community, has garnered her more weddings and galas than the property has ever seen before.

During a recent monthly tasting luncheon where the NCC team invites potential clients to experience the property during a special luncheon, Meyers was wearing her community supporter hat. Working ahead and looking to book holiday parties, she planned for a holiday theme that included a connection with Toys for Tots and asked attendees to make a donation.

She also has been a great supporter and organizer of the Belmont Ridge Middle School business/partnership, and the NCC was presented with the School/ Business Partnership Award in 2009.



Ever the community philanthropist, Meyers was inspired while planning a recent holiday-themed event to ask guests for donations to the Toys for Tots campaign. Her bounty was shared with representatives from the Marine Corps, which sponsors the campaign.

As if that was not enough, she was part of the 2010 Leadership Loudoun class, which involves a heavy dose of extra hours outside of work, planning and learning about the community. She is also a board member of the Loudoun Free Clinic, planning their next event to be held at NCC this fall.

With all the plates that Sharon keeps spinning seemingly without effort, "How do you do it all?" is a fair question. Meyers just quietly smiles and waves the question off. "I love what I do, and I just make it work."