

... Culinary Stars to make your next Event stellar

Sharon Snyder, Standing Room Only's co-owner and off-premises catering director, offered me coffee, and—no surprise here—it was very good. "It had better be," she says. "I drink a lot of it because I'm always manic." She must be, to manage the logistics of the 10 parties scheduled for the upcoming weekend. "We're obsessive," she admits. "If things don't go 100 percent the way we want them to, it makes us crazy."

That obsession has been the catalyst for 14 years of catering success. Snyder, who caught the catering bug entertaining customers of her husband's clothing shops, and partner Jack Tacconi, a cooking-school grad, will do whatever it takes to deliver their menu exactly as promised, wherever it is promised. They have catered events in a variety of locations—parking facilities, barns—the more unusual, the better. "It excites me to work on something totally new, where I'm pushed to be more creative," Snyder says. "It's stimulating to have to dig down and bring up new ideas."

Those ideas have been applied to South-of-the-Border- and 1970s-themed benefits for Kids in Crisis, a Connecticut-based nonprofit organization that benefits abused children. Snyder also adopted an ethnic focus during an African tasting menu for 700 guests. "My chefs and I spent lots of time researching," Snyder recalls. The menu featured authentic dishes like coconut milk/paprika/chili-marinated Piri Piri shrimp—ethnic, yes, but tempered to American tastes. "You're not going to get people in Westchester to eat goat," Snyder says with a shrug.

Goat notwithstanding, Standing Room Only's food tends toward the innovative. Though Executive Chef Herb Lindstrom is classically trained, Asian flavors dominate in one of his most popular dishes: cracked red pepper salmon marinated in sesame oil, soy sauce, ginger, garlic, lime juice and red pepper flakes. Another bestseller: pencil-thin spring rolls with daikon and bean sprouts sauced with a tangy dried apricot-and-rice-wine-vinegar reduction.

Standing Room Only's flair extends to presentation as well. Lindstrom arranges the spring rolls in a puffy nest of fried cellophane noodles, the rolls jutting out in a spiky bouquet. And forget generic silver trays and tepid beige baskets; thanks to Snyder's shopping addiction, Lindstrom's crudités pose in sculpted geometric platters; his roasted artichoke spread and tomato/ poblano/citrus dip in tiered glass pots take the place of candles in a votive candle holder.

Details like these elevate a party from standard to special, though Chef Lindstrom admits that guests occasionally can be overly enthusiastic. "We'll make a beautifully garnished presentation, and people will eat the garnishes," he laments. "I'll decorate an Asian platter with lotus root, sugar cane skewers, baby bok choy and watermelon radish, and people want to try them because they look so great."

Beauty has its price, but it's one Standing Room Only is happy to pay.