When it comes to parties, there's seemingly no limit to what people are willing to arrange—and spend. Here's a look at some current trends in party-giving, followed by a statewide resource guide to help you plan your own.







Ву

Margaret

Farley Steele



cancer. Thinking ahead to 2006, the Stamford resident realized her 50th birthday and her father's 80th would coincide in August, the same month as her 25th wedding anniversary. "If we pull through this, we will celebrate," she vowed. And celebrate they did, treating 99 guests to dinner and dancing at a loft in New York In Greenwich, for her husband's 50th birthday last year, the wife of a high-profile financier surprised him with a threeday extravaganza for 30 friends and relatives that started with a welcoming lobster bake Friday evening and concluded

with brunch on Sunday. Across Connecticut, people are touting February 2007 CONNECTICUT 53

excuse for excess. For a 22nd communicating," she recalls. "I birthday in October, Fallo

wanted it sparkly and festive, and I wanted that wow factor."

She had already interviewed

and rejected three planners when she discovered Traci

Romano. The invitation

celebrating life," says Traci Romano, founder of The Romano Group Event Planning and Design in Westport. "We're in a delicate situation around the world and when you have a happy occasion, you really want to celebrate it." Birthdays, bar and bat mitzvahs, and anniversaries have long inspired festivity, but the planning process today goes way beyond managing food, beverages and RSVPs. "It's all about putting on a production," says Lyndsey Hamilton, an

life's big moments in ever

cases on event planners to create can-you-top-this celebra-

grander style, relying in many

tions. "There's a huge trend in

New York and Connecticut. And the challenge for our times is "incorporating a person's life into the party and personalizing it," she adds. For the Greenwich financier, for example, each event of the weekend was themed around a

event planner with offices in

weekend and provided gift baskets and flowers in their rooms. There was a catch, however: They also had to sign a privacy waiver, says Hamilton, declining to reveal her client's name or the tally except to say it cost "a couple hundred thousand That was her most extensive job to date, but "hugely elaborate multiday parties-that's the thing nowadays," she says. THE AIM TODAY is a party bigger and better than anyone else's, agrees Elissa Fallo, vice

president of Perfect Productions

50th and 60th parties predomi-

in Farmington. While 40th,

nate on the birthday circuit,

place where he had lived. The

lobster dinner Friday evening

evoked Nantucket, the safari-

style gala on Saturday, Africa,

and on Sunday it was brunch

with a French twist. Guests,

world, were housed for the

who flew in from around the

they are by no means the only Party Time
UNIQUE IDEAS low tables and pillows for dining, and draping 1,500 yards of gold, turquoise and burgundy organza to create a scene worthy of a sultan. More than 100 candles flickered as the guests savored a meal cooked by the chef of a Turkish restaurant. The guest of honor attends the University of Connecticut; his wife, a friend of Fallo's, is "the Paris Hilton of the Turkish world," according to Fallo. Fallo won an award from the International Special Events Society for pulling the whole thing off in less than a week. When it came to her big bash in New York, Japha was surprised it took so long to find the right planner. "I had a vision that I had a hard time

The state's top party acces-

sory may be the Big Green Truck, a restored 1946

International Harvester that

your site and opens up to

owner Doug Coffin drives to

orchestrated a \$70,000 Moroc-

can-theme party for just 15

guests. The expense included

renting a penthouse suite, mov-

ing out the furniture and stor-

ing it for the night, setting up

details and putting them says Romano. ments and listings on the Web and came up with the idea of

Romano suggested-hand-sewn with silver circular confetti reflecting a "circle of life" theme-"blew me away and set the tone," says Japha. The party planner noted that the significant years for the three "circle of life" celebrants added up to 155, and that became the name of a cocktail served at the bar. as well as the logo on the cocktail napkins and hand towels. "Thinking about all the little together" is what sets a fantastic party apart from a ho-hum one, Japha and her dad, Norbert Gaelen, decided not to celebrate in a typical party venue. Japha pored over wedding announce-

## clambake? Hammonasset Clambake & BBQ Co. offers a number of delightful choices, from a modest "shuckyour-own" affair to a fully catered lobster blowout. You can reach them at hamclam.com or (203) 245-0184.

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Cruises on the Connecticut River. The on-board options range from picnic-casual to white-tablecloth formal, but the views up and down the river are reliably captivating. The Majestic can accommodate 149 for a party and cruises.com.

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more involved in the planning

says, noting that many have multiple entertainers, such as clowns, magicians, balloon sculptors and DJs.

ative end for a 100-person

I agree with it," says planner Seccuro. party, with lighting, photography, florals and her design fee, could reach \$25,000, the cost of a new American car. Food and beverages might put the tab over \$50,000, she adds. For clients who prefer to do much of the legwork themselves, Seccuro charges \$150 an hour; otherwise her starting fee is \$6,000. Carol Albert of Buds in Bloom in West Hartford itemizes jobs like centerpieces and adds 20 percent for vendors she

still striving to walk and talk. "First birth-

although I'm not sure

days are huge,

lavish parties. "Most of our Connecticut business tends to be in Fairfield County, where entertaining is almost like a sport," says Liz Seccuro, owner of Dolce Parties in Greenwich. The sky's the limit in children's parties too, even for 1year-olds still striving to walk and talk. "First birthdays are huge, although I'm not sure I agree with it," says Seccuro, referring not just to the number of guests but to what she calls "blow-the-bank craziness." A Westport couple spent well over \$5,000 on their son's first

birthday last fall, says Romano,

who coordinated the at-home

gala. The guests, 40 adults and

catered by Cabbages & Kings in

Weston, including individually

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Party Time

boxed chicken fingers for the children. The hired entertainer,

18 children, enjoyed meals

NOT SURPRISINGLY, wealthy Fairfield County suburbanites stage some of Connecticut's most

a magician called Mr. Bungles, had to work without face makeup for fear of scaring the guest of honor and his pals, who were too young to appreciate his standard clown gig. In the 20 years that Nancy Douglas of Stamford has been in the party business with Let's Have a Party Premiere Events, first birthdays have ballooned from intimate, low-key family affairs to galas with sometimes 20, 40 or 60 children. "You have no idea how large some of these parties are," she

The trend toward can-you-top-this parties is evident throughout the state for all age groups. "In this hectic world, people relish the chance to get everyone together for these milestones," says Fallo. "Whether they have the money or not, they're spending it, thinking, Tll pay for it later." Douglas concurs: "Even people you think might not be able to [afford] additional entertainment find it important to have it," she says. Even so, Seccuro tells her clients that successful entertaining is about much more

should be about being a gracious host and

showing guests a good time," she says.

"People should never leave your event say-

money!' They should leave saying, 'Wow,

their own landmark birthday parties. "It's not considered tacky," she says. "It's acceptable." For a 50th, she coordinated an itinerary for 30 that included transportation, spa beauty treatments, drinks and a seven-

that was the best party I've ever been to." Lately, Seccuro sees more women hosting

course tasting menu. For the finale, they went dancing and received very grown-up "goody bags"-with Egyptian cotton pajamas and cashmere slippers. INDEED, GIFT BAGS and party favors, once the purview of the under-8 set, play a prominent part in today's fetes. Guests of Meryl Japha and her dad received a handblown bottle into which was tucked a note written by Japha or Gaelen recounting that person's importance in their life. The waiters passed out the bottles on silver trays. "Some people cried, others waited till they got home to read them," recalls Japha, explaining they

had limited the guest list to men and women who "had given our lives meaning." Among them were artists whose works her parents

collected.

Many parties are less personal, and so are the accompanying party favors. "They're a waste," says Carol Albert of West Hartford, Dreams Do

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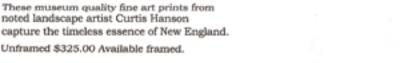
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Connecticut, people celebrate in "a more themey way," says Fallo. For an avid card player who turned 85, she designed a "Queen of Hearts" party with jumbo playing cards in the centerpieces, red sequin tablecloths and a personalized deck of cards for each of the 58 guests. The icing on the cake was in the form of a royal flush.

they are inexpensive picture frames or prici-

Trends in party design come and go, plan-

ners say. At ISES, which has an international

perspective, Braun says the coming trend is a return to elegance. But for now in

er bracelets.

who looked like Bond girls. For a theme to work, it should be present consistently through all the details, from invitations to menus to favors-"or it's not worth doing," says Fallo. Ally Markowitz, 13, of Canton loves to shop, and "Shop Till You Drop" became the theme for her bat mitzvah in November. To implement it, Ally's parents, Susan and David Markowitz, turned to planner Carol Albert. "I was kind of at a loss," says Susan. "We knew exactly what we wanted but I wasn't sure how to do it." On the wish list were

"May, Cornubia"

Available in a limited edition of 500 museum quality prints, each signed and numbered by the artist. Unframed prints measure 28" x 24". than how much money they spend. "It ing, 'Wow, they must have spent a lot of

Handcalted Truttles & Other Delectable Confections! 107 River St., Downtown Millord • 203,783,9770 • www.hmangels.com To request Free Info, see page 16 who entered the business 26 years ago. Ally's name flashing in lights, and centerpieces, place cards and menus reflecting the "When we clean up, we find all those things are left behind," she says, no matter whether 'Shop Till You Drop with Ally" theme. Susan

> did much of the legwork herself, schlepping into 18 stores to get different shopping bags,

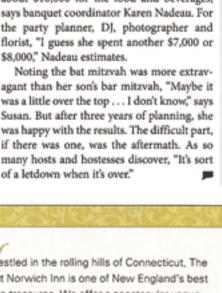
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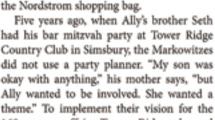
everything else is just candy.

For a James Bond party, she conjured up a 160-person affair, Tower Ridge charged martini bar carved out of ice and dancers about \$10,000 for the food and beverages, \$8,000," Nadeau estimates.

which then figured prominently in each centerpiece. Instead of numbering the tables, place cards said "Mr. and Mrs. John Smith will be shopping at Nordstrom tonight," and guests knew to then look for the table with

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