

Social Host Primer

As the holidays draw closer, we tend to think about parties and that includes what to wear, what kind of food to serve, the decorations to make the party “fun”. We are looking forward to open houses, office parties, New Year’s Eve events and into the New Year - Super Bowl parties and so on.

But too often in the search for the best party plan, we forget that we need to understand the role of alcohol in the party and how it can make *or break* the party. Taking the time to think about alcohol service will better insure that our guests have a good time AND get home safely, and we will have a good night’s sleep after it is all over.

What are the basics?

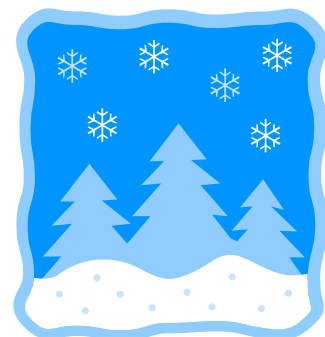
1. It is always about insuring that our guests are safe, both at the party and in the process of returning home.
2. Do we have liability insurance? What is the coverage and does it include service of alcohol? How much coverage do we have and is it enough? Keep in mind that many alcohol related crashes are serious and can result in significant injuries which can mean significant damages/awards. If you don’t have enough insurance, your personal assets could be at risk in a lawsuit.
3. Are there any potential problems where I am hosting the party? For example, do my guests need to take stairs to use a washroom and are the stairs safe? Hosting a safe party is not just about making sure that your guests don’t drink and drive but that they aren’t injured at all because of too much drinking.

Even if you are renting the place where you live, you are considered an “occupier” in law, so you have a responsibility to be sure that the premises are safe, the activities at your premises are safe, and the condition of your guests is safe.

4. Who are you inviting? There are some people who don’t know when to stop drinking and could make problems for you and other guests. You may want to consider whether it is worth having them at the party, whether you can talk to them in advance and set out some ground rules or whether you would just have a better time if they weren’t there.

How many guests are you inviting? In this day of electronic communication, you may need to double-check that only the people you *want* at your party *are* at your party.

5. On the invite, ask people to take a cab or to establish a designated driver to avoid potential “issues”. If your guests know your intentions, there is less chance of a problem at the party itself.



At Your Party:

1. Meet, Greet and Repeat – be sure to try to meet and greet all your guests at the door as they arrive. We know that there are some days when people might attend two or three parties. You want to know what shape they are in as they arrive and whether they should have any further alcohol. You also want to say good bye to all your guests to insure that they are able to drive and/or determine who is the designated driver.
2. Focus on food. Yes this is the time of year that everyone seems to gain a bit, but take the time to serve a good spread, *including* non-alcoholic drinks. Keep in mind that protein/fat rich food will help slow the absorption rate of alcohol into the blood stream. Salt heavy foods simply encourage people to drink more and sugar-heavy foods could have an adverse reaction with alcohol.
3. Keep the alcohol in one central place. If you can afford it, hire a bartender (with insurance of course). If not, you should manage all the service of alcohol (wine, beer, mixed drinks) yourself (remember to measure your alcohol with a mixed drink). Try to avoid self-service if possible, as few people know what is a “standard drink”. You are the host and are responsible for knowing what your guests are consuming.
4. Keep cab numbers handy, on speed dial or written and by the phone. If you have a guest that seems to have imbibed too much, call the cab and then try to reason with him/her. If a cab is right there, then it is easier to persuade a guest to leave his/her car keys with you and take the cab.
5. If an issue of too much aggression comes up, don’t be a hero. Call the police and keep your other guests safe. You should not try to become physically involved as it will likely result in becoming injured.
6. If a guest leaves and you know that that person has been drinking and you even suspect that he/she is driving, call the police. That really is true friendship, despite what this guest may say. No one wants to be a Scrooge, but far better that than finding out the next day that your guest was involved in a crash.

The holiday season should be fun – good planning will help avoid potential risk and keep it fun for everyone.

Shelley Timms
Timshel Services Inc.
416-767-4210
timshel@timshelservices.com