

► Founder and President, A Legendary Event

Conway

Tony

As founder and president of A Legendary Event, the upscale party-planning/catering company, **Tony Conway** is at the helm of 600 events per year, ranging from intimate V.I.P. gatherings to fundraisers for 6,000. Former director of catering and conventions for Marriott Hotels, Stouffer Hotels and Ritz-Carlton Hotels, he now manages a staff of 240 and has won many awards, including this year's humanitarian award at Style Atlanta. But no matter how large or small the event, he works from a core philosophy: "Any place can be stylish," says Conway. "Stylish entertaining is about service and attention to detail. It's about going a step further in taking care of your guests."

- **In all the cities I've worked in** during my career, Atlanta is one of the most inviting for parties and entertaining.
- **Atlantans are really concerned** about the comfort of their guests. In other cities I've worked in [like New York and Dallas], it was just about "Let's be fashionable and stylish and have it be a really great party, but I really don't care if guests aren't comfortable. They'll get over it." Not in Atlanta.
- **One of the biggest mistakes people make** is skimping on service. I hear it over and over: "Let's just cut back on the number of waiters," or "Let's do one bartender instead of the three we need." Enjoy your parties. And have your guests enjoy them.
- **Atlanta is so traditional.** With all that there is to offer out there these days, it shouldn't be just tenderloin and shrimp.
- **This is one of the worst cities** I've worked in for RSVPing. Just showing up to a party without RSVPing. Or RSVPing the day of. Or RSVPing for one and showing up with a guest. An RSVP is yes or no and a thank you. Even if you can't make it, you should make the courtesy of calling to say, "Thanks for inviting me, but I can't come."
- **It's interesting when we've watched a guest** take a few items off of the buffet and put them into her purse. You want to say, "Can I just get you a doggie bag?"
- **Double dipping** is common [in Atlanta]. Dip into, take a bite and then dip into again. Put it on a plate.
- **Lighting up a cigarette** in a private home around the other guests—I thought we'd come to an era when smoking is outside, if you're going to do it. That just amazes me.
- **I've seen someone spill** red wine on a white sofa or a carpet in front of guests and then just walk away.
- **I hate seeing big plastic liter bottles** of Coca-Cola or Sprite. Pour it into a pitcher and make the rest of your party look elegant.
- **Simple things are stylish**—like the things that Nordstrom did for the grand opening. It was a misty night, and guests got Varsity pies and hot chocolate as they waited for their cars. It gave a bit of an Atlanta tradition.
- **I love when hosts or hostesses know** food allergies their guests may have because they're so common. For the last couple of years, we've been keeping a database on our society list. We know who's allergic to garlic or pine nuts or who's had heart surgery.
- **We once did a wonderful dinner party** for 60 guests in a three-car garage. There was not enough space in the house so we carpeted, draped and chandeliered the garage with over 300 candles burning in there. Guitarists in the corner.
- **I love collaborating with chefs** in our city—to get 10 minutes with Anne Quatrano or Guenter Seeger. I talked about Fiji water with Guenter. We had a 10-minute conversation about water, which is so great.
- **I tell my staff all the time:** How difficult is our job that all we're there to do is help someone celebrate? It's just such a wonderful life. After 27 years, I wake up loving going to work. It's not that I'm a workaholic. I'm not at all. It's a party. My life's a party.

LIFE OF THE PARTY Conway cases Richard's Variety Store in a Giorgio Armani Black Label shirt, \$495, and suit, \$1,945, available at Giorgio Armani in Phipps Plaza. Having lived in Texas, one of his favorite styles of home entertaining is Tex-Mex. Perhaps this explains the piñatas?

