



The Relationship Expert

Corina Wian-Literski, event designer at the A La Carte Event Pavilion, has expanded the venue's corporate reach through the creation and expansion of new departments, breadth of services offered, and above all, dedication to client relationships.

As the event designer for the A La Carte Event Pavilion in Tampa, Corina Wian-Literski is an artist. Conceiving an event in her mind and then working backward to deconstruct it, Wian-Literski is responsible for all the visual elements that go into it. Her creative skills and attention to clients draw responses such as "Go for it!" and "Whatever you say." Before joining the team at the pavilion five and a half years ago, Wian-Literski spent 18 years as the visual merchandising designer for Burdines-Macys throughout Florida while cultivating her event design skills on the side. That experience led her to A La Carte, where she has set up a full decor department, expanded the venue's services with this year's launch of off-site catering and decor, strengthened ties with local nonprofit groups, and worked on expanding corporate clientele. She's currently responsible for 20 percent of the venue's overall revenue.

How did you get your start in the industry?

We had a program in high school where we could intern for credit during our senior year, so I went to work at a department store doing their windows. At that time I met someone who owned a decor company, so I started working with her on the side.

That's really when I fell in love with the industry, and continued doing exactly that for the next 18 years before coming to A La Carte.

How many events do you coordinate annually?

Between holiday, social, and corporate events, I would say 80 to 100 events, with a bit more than half being social. Corporate has previously been an uncharted territory, which is something I've been focusing on developing this year. Our biggest selling point has been the size of our building and ease of parking. Clients haven't really come in for the decor, so I've been introducing our options with baby steps.

It seems like your relationships with clients are a big part of the work you do.

They really are, and it means so much to have them trust in my designs and in me to make their event a success. My main client who says "Just do it" is the Moffitt Cancer Center. We do their gala every year, so having an amazing relationship with Kathy, the director of special events and marketing over there, is huge for me. When I first started working with them, I spent a lot of time on the decor and overall feel and they saw that and we grew our relationship to the level it's at now.

What's been your biggest accomplishment since joining the team at the pavilion?

The decor department didn't really exist and the pavilion did a lot of contracting out before I came. But my boss had a lot of faith and trust in me, as did the clients, so I was able to really put the entire department together.

We've come so far that we've started having clients call for us to do decor off-site, so we set that up as an option for them. In fact, we worked on an off-site event (we do both catering and decor off site) last December where we had to do a 950-person dinner for Franklin Templeton Investments in a parking lot, with only a month to do it.

Since the group was so diverse, the company's planner wanted menu options from around the world and decor to reflect. We had only a short time to set up and make it flow since we had to wait for all the cars to leave, but in the end it was really amazing. You wouldn't have known you were in a parking lot.

What would say was your standout event of the past year?

Definitely the Moffitt fund-raiser. This past year I was also nominated for *Event Solutions'* Event Designer of the Year and, even though I didn't make it as a finalist, I was completely ecstatic to know I was even nominated.

What can we expect from you in the future?

Right now I really enjoy doing what I'm doing, but I would like to grow our department at A La Carte. I have a staff of six now and I'd like to grow it even more, as we are sometimes limited because of it. I really want people to know who I am, to gain the trust level that I have with Moffitt with other people. —D. Channing Muller