

BESA's Best

The annual expo of the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Event Services Association draws a large crowd each year, and for good reason

BY ALANNA BERMAN

Brandon Berson celebrates his bar mitzvah with a candy buffet.



PHOTOS BY DEL RIO STUDIOS

Where can you find event planners, deejays, caterers and photographers — who are all familiar with b'nai mitzvah traditions and sure to make any ceremony and celebration a success — all in one place? This month, on March 4, you'll find them all at the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Event Services Association Expo.

Held at the Hyatt La Jolla Aventine, the expo will feature all thoroughly vetted and b'nai mitzvah-approved BESA members, including some of the newest to the group. Each member, from entertainment companies to caterers to videographers, will have his or her best work

on display to parents and kids looking for ideas for their own special days. And whether families need a lot of help or would prefer some assistance only with the final touches, there is something for everyone at this year's expo.

"It's a free event, it's open to the public, and it's a really great opportunity for people who are shopping for vendors," says Lydia Krasner, co-chair of BESA, as well as a BESA member herself (she has a party planning business, Mitzvah Event Productions). "At the expo you can meet [all the vendors you'll need] in the same room, and you can look at their previous work and then go home and call only the ones you liked, rather than spending time on a dozen meetings trying

to decide which, say, photographer is right for your child."

Each year, more than 1,200 people attend the expo, from parents shopping solo to parents with their children in tow, to gain a sense of what is on trend and available locally in the b'nai mitzvah industry. Krasner, along with BESA co-chair Patricia Del Rio, has welcomed several new vendors as members in the last year. Being BESA members themselves (Del Rio co-owns Del Rio Studios, a photography company, with her husband), both Krasner and Del Rio have insight into what works, what doesn't and how parents can get the most bang for their buck.

"People are starting to plan ahead more," Del



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L-R: Patricia Del Rio, BESA co-president; Janet Wright, expo director; and Lydia Krasner, BESA co-president.



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Rio says. "Where we saw people waiting until the last minute [to plan their ceremonies and celebrations] in the past, now they are starting to think about it earlier. [Those people] are getting the best match for their event and better prices for services, since they aren't scrambling trying to find what's left at the last minute."

And getting a good deal is a great thing, especially when strict budgets are front and center for many families.

"There was a time prior to our recession when it felt like parents were trying to keep up with each other [in the scale of the parties]," Del Rio says. "Now we're not trying to go over the top, but just to do something creative, and trying to personalize it more. The celebration is as important as it ever was, but they don't feel the need to outdo each other."

For Krasner, who is planning the bar and bat mitzvah of her own children (she has twins, a boy and a girl), to be held later this year, the need to have a unique and creative party is still important, but the need to go over the top is not. Instead, it's the meaning behind the special day that counts.

"It's about being together and celebrating the future," she says. "My son will be the first boy [in our family] to have a bar mitzvah, and for my

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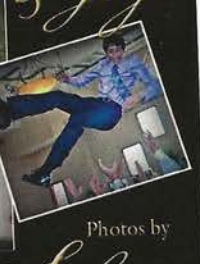
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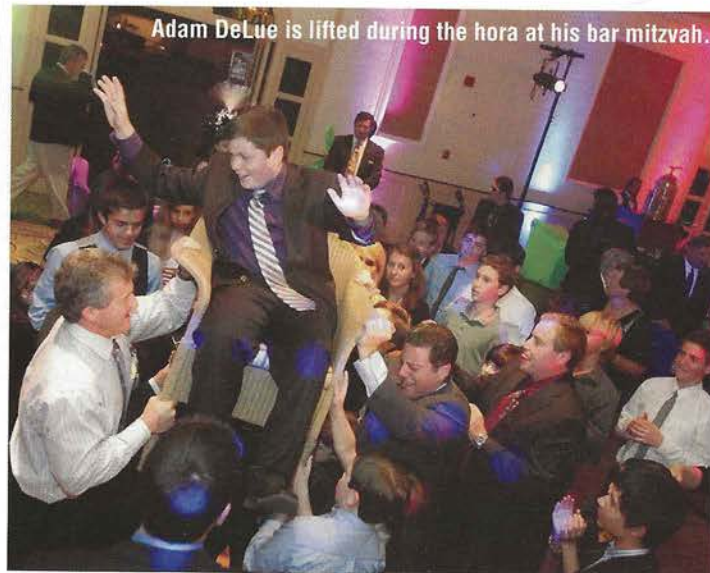
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Adam DeLue is lifted during the hora at his bar mitzvah.

daughter, I didn't get a chance to have a bat mitzvah until later in my life, so I'm really excited to give that to her. It's almost overwhelming, and I know what the parents [I work with all the time] are feeling now."

Thankfully, BESA members offer an array of different pricing levels for all budgets, and smart choices can really stretch a dollar. Things like 'up lighting' and custom logos that can be repeated throughout the party create a consistent theme and go a long way in creating a memorable party without costing a lot.

"Our newest member is Backdrops Beautiful, which creates custom backdrops for entryways and for the party," Krasner says. "That really can change the environment in any room, as far as the theme. Anything that glows is also a big hit. Lighting can really make the party by adding color to the room. It's not expensive, but it really adds a huge element that is missing in a lot of the banquet halls and hotel ballrooms that are usually painted in neutral color palettes. For me, the details like that are what make it happen."

With all the centralized expertise of BESA members, it's no wonder families with kids as young as fifth grade attend the expo, shopping early and shopping often.

Raffle games bring another level of fun to the expo, giving visitors a chance to win "BESA Bucks," which they can use toward their future bill with any member of BESA. For everyone involved, it's a very exciting event.

"It's such an awesome opportunity for anyone who's planning a bar or bat mitzvah, and for those who wait for this event year after year," Del Rio says. "To see the buzz in the room, it's incredible."

For more information about BESA and a current list of its members, visit www.besasandiego.com. This year's BESA Expo, "BESAopoly" (with a Monopoly theme) will be Sunday, March 4, from noon-4 p.m. at the Hyatt La Jolla Aventura. Admission is free. For more information, visit www.besaexpo.com. ☆

Food cost/person: \$30-45

Food style: kosher

Pacifica Del Mar
1555 Camino Del Mar
pacificadelmar.com
(855) 792-0476

Food cost/person: \$40-70

Food style: primarily seafood, with steak and chicken options available

Villa Capri
8935 Town Center Drive
villacapristorante.com
(858) 622-1202

Food cost/person: varies by option, call for quote

Food style: Italian

B Festivities Catering
9558 Camino Ruiz
festivitiescatering.com
(858) 586-2121

Food cost/person: \$30-120

Food style: California coastal/fusion

B Dolce Donuts
dolcedonuts.com
(619) 985-9854
Food cost/person: call for quote
Food style: donuts and treats

B Java Jive Espresso Catering
javalive@cox.net
(858) 876-5282
Food cost/person: call for quote
Food style: coffee

B Sensational Treats
sensationaltreats.com
(858) 776-4999
Food cost/person: \$5-15
Food style: interactive dessert stations

B Chocolate Haven
chocolate-haven.com
(619) 993-7785
Food cost/person: call for quote
Food style: chocolate fountains and figurines (kosher options available)

5 PARTY PLANNING TIPS

from BESA co-president and veteran party planner Lydia Krasner

Whether you're planning the party yourself or with the help of an event professional, here are some things to keep in mind throughout the process:

01

Find something meaningful to the child

"When I find meaning with a family, or ways to bring in a child's unique heritage, I always recommend we go with that. It's something that is about him or her so that it is really personalized. Anyone can do a soccer theme, anyone can do a Broadway theme. I like to find something special and personalize it for the child."

Pay attention and know your audience

02

"That means having kid-friendly food *and* having adult-friendly food. It also means having a DJ that can balance adults and younger kids. I have a lot of people who say 'my kid has a very extensive palate, he'll eat gazpacho' but not every kid does. It's important to be aware of who's coming to your party."

03

Love is in the details

"Walt Disney said: 'If you want to get their attention, whisper' so that's been my motto for my business. For example, if I do a candy theme, I'll have a candy bracelet as a napkin ring. I'll decorate the restroom. Those little details are what people go home with."

Be open to suggestions from the pros

04

"We do this every week, so we're current on what works and what doesn't. It's really important to hire the professionals and let them do their jobs. Remember that the party goes by in the blink of an eye."

05

Have one point-person

"This is key with any event. You never know what's going to happen and it's important that the parents are able to be emotionally present for their family."