

A Gala Occasion

Rogers & Gala Take The Glitches Out Of Memorable Events

BY ANDREA COOPER

THE BRIDE TELEPHONED ANGELA GALA at 7 a.m. There had been a torrential downpour the night before, and the party tent in her back yard was flooded. Hundreds of guests were due to arrive that night for the wedding reception. Gala, the event planner, told the bride just to have fun preparing for her wedding ceremony and not to worry.

Like any rational person, Gala allowed herself a moment of sheer panic before springing into action. Thankfully, she had earlier convinced the bride to get flooring in the tent — a wise move — or else the bride and groom would have been having dinner in the mud. Gala immediately called a carpet cleaner and paid him to vacuum up as much water as possible. The tent provider returned to adjust the gutters. The décor designer re-hung the fabric. Gala draped linens over the tables, and laid out place settings at the last minute. By the time the guests arrived, they had no idea a deluge had nearly wiped out the party.

That's what Angela Gala and Sikky Rogers of Rogers & Gala Creative Partners are paid to do: help clients create memorable events — from corporate meetings and conventions to holiday parties and other social gatherings. Since these events

can be so complex, with many people involved, Gala and Rogers are calm, collected repairers of anything that goes

Angela Gala (standing) and Sikky Rogers blend two distinctive styles into one outstanding business.



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wrong. "The key to fabulous events is knowing how to handle the glitches," Gala says.

The company's client list is a *Who's Who* of prominent Charlotte families. Over the years, Rogers and Gala have planned events for University of North Carolina President Erskine Bowles and his wife, Springs Industries' Chairman Crandall Bowles; auto and racing moguls Linda and Rick Hendrick; and retired Carolina Panther Steve Beuerlein.

The Shoe Fits

Not everyone is temperamentally suited to this demanding line of work. Gala's life adds another twist: She's married, and the mother of three: 19-month-old twins, Hayden and Grant, and 4-year-old Cole. "I've written business notes on an Etch-A-Sketch," she quips.

Gala is quick to credit those whose help has enabled her to succeed both on the home front and in business. "My mother did all the grocery shopping for seven months while I was pregnant with the twins," she says. "My sister fills in with babysitting, and occasionally takes Cole to school. We have a part-time nanny who is a huge help. Most important is my husband, Paul, who supports my ambitions, and provides wonderful advice and counsel."

Gala is also fortunate to have had a background that prepared her for handling a dozen details at once. Her parents ran a residential remodeling agency in Louisville, Ky., so Gala got an early start in sales. After graduating from the University of Louisville, she became a sales associate for the Sheraton Hotel in Charlotte, and was soon promoted to catering director.



Rogers & Gala prepared events during the PGA's Wachovia Championship Golf Tournament at Quail Hollow Country Club.

PHOTO BY RICHARD ISRAELI

Gala planned weddings, trade shows, week-long conventions and other events at the property near the airport, often dealing with last-minute requests from business travelers. It was a job that required organization, late hours, diplomacy and excruciating attention to detail.

After six years at the Sheraton, Gala left for the relative serenity of the Charlotte City Club, where she was director of private parties. There, she met Sikky Rogers, one of the city's best-known wedding planners, who was organizing a rehearsal dinner. "I loved the way she worked," Gala recalls. "She counseled her client, but allowed me to do my job. She expected the best from me, but she also made me feel I could do it."

Two Women, Different Generations, One Business

When Gala was ready to start a family a few years later, she was surprised to find herself thinking about Rogers. It would be impossible to have young children and continue her current job with its long hours. Rogers, whose children, Kim Raines and Tom Rogers III, are grown, had been going strong in the field for 20 years. Gala hoped that perhaps she would be ready to sell her wedding planning business. "But I wasn't," Rogers says. "I loved my job, and wasn't ready to retire."

A week later, Gala called again and asked Rogers to hire her. "You don't need me," Rogers replied. "You can do it yourself." So she did.

The women kept in touch, and, eventually, did some weddings together. In July 2003, they officially combined businesses to create Rogers & Gala.

Rogers knew that by combining their strengths, they could become more productive. Since merging forces and expanding the business to offer corporate event services, their company revenue has grown 50 percent each year. (It didn't hurt that both Rogers and Gala had extensive experience in social planning, and were already acquainted with many local CEOs.) Full-time staffer, Emily Norman, helps keep operations running smoothly. Associate planner, Jane Daniel, joins Rogers & Gala for big events.

While it isn't common to find business partners who are a generation apart, Rogers and Gala find their skills complement each other. "Sikky is great with color and texture," Gala says. "My taste is a little less traditional. She's an amazing designer with an eye for everything that is fine and appropriate. Her >

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taste is impeccable, and she's got a real instinct for understanding what people want."

For her part, Rogers calls Gala "a genius with food and wine and a perfectionist who's in touch with industry trends." Gala also brings strong business and sales skills to the partnership. Still, the age difference makes for some amusing moments — like the times people have assumed that Gala is Rogers' assistant.

Hello, Big Time

Rogers & Gala's clients come to them through word of mouth. Their fees are based on the complexity of each project. "Rogers & Gala always do what they say they will and never over-promise," Erskine Bowles observes. "They have enormous integrity." Some of their notable corporate clients include the *Confrerie des Chevaliers du Tastevin* International Wine Festival, Cogentrix Corporation, the Girl Scouts of America, the Mint Museum of Art and the Charlotte Museum of History.

Each event begins with a meeting in which the partners learn more about the person, family or company involved. They discuss the client's likes and style, and toss ideas back and forth until a theme

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— Angela Gala**

emerges. Rogers is especially skilled at being able to visualize an event before it happens, which makes the planning easier.

The partners' first major coup was the PGA's premier Wachovia Championship Golf Tournament at Quail Hollow Country Club in 2004. The team was hired to turn the country club ballroom into four different environments for golfers to get information about the tournament, dine with their families, and watch the play in a comfortable, private atmosphere. "With the help of a wonderful team, we had walls built that were meant to look as if they had always been there, and decorated each space," Gala says. They also turned a terrace into a garden for private dining. Rogers & Gala's efforts were such a success, they were invited back for a repeat performance in 2005.

To keep physically and mentally fit to face her challenging schedule, Gala gets up every morning for a 5 a.m. run to energize herself for the day ahead. That energy translates into a love for her work, especially the fantasy element that allows her to take an ordinary room for a holiday party, and bring something like *The Polar Express* to life. "My favorite events," says Gala, "are the ones where people tell me it was much more than they ever expected." **TCW**

AngelaGalaOnWhat'sHot,Not,AndAlwaysIn



PHOTO BY JOSEPH MARTINE FLOREAL BY CAROLYN SHERMAN DESIGN GROUP

- **Renewed Attention To Detail.** I've noticed that women are more concerned with the details of their party, right down to the place cards. Even the largest events are personalized. The typical host is making sure her event not only welcomes and entertains her guests, but also represents who she and her family are.
- **Food First.** With the growing popularity of the Food Network and magazines such as *Saveur* and *Cooks Illustrated*, our clients are more savvy and educated than ever when it comes to dining and food preparation. They want food that tastes good first and looks good second, although they are willing to sacrifice neither.
- **Color.** It's still big in all events. Different shades and tones of the same color provide a big impact. Martha Stewart has perfected this monotone look.
- **The '70s Are Over — Again.** In recent years, the '70s revival brought back turquoise and aqua, avocado and pea green and wonderful shades of brown. The influence could be seen in everything from packaging and gift wrap to furniture and fashion. For events, we saw those colors, dots and stripes become hip again, but now they are on their way out.
- **But The '80s Are In.** Embellishments are straight out of the '80s, but with a '40s influence. We see it in the resurgence of gold over platinum and silver to the colored faux jewels that are returning to adorn the outfits of today's top designers. Because the runways are a good preview of what's to come in color, texture and pattern, I wouldn't be surprised if the '80s-inspired shades of lavender and peach make a comeback in special-event designs.
- **Lighting.** It can help to achieve an all-over color; it's also critical for creating atmosphere. With the recent reduction in price for LED, or light emitting diode technology, better lighting has become available. It provides more pure color, uses less electricity, and stays cool. LED has opened up a world of possibilities for lighting events.
- **Choosing An Event Theme.** There's inspiration for an event theme all around you, from your kid's kite to your love for Katherine Hepburn movies. Something that means a lot to you, when presented creatively and tastefully, can be the starting point for a memorable event.
- **Finding What's Fresh.** The new trends in New York and Los Angeles take a while to reach Charlotte, but it's my job to look ahead, and provide our clients with innovative ideas to make their events fun, interesting and entertaining. We love the challenge of creating what hasn't been done before, and bringing new things to Charlotte.