

Let's get the Olympic party started

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How do you and your family plan to watch the Olympics?

With the 2010 Winter Games taking place in Vancouver, it's the perfect time to celebrate all that is Canada, from Nanaimo bars to hockey.

Why not throw a party, gathering friends and family around the TV for a night of international competition with Canadian flare?

"Canadians don't tend to be as patriotic as Americans," says Richmond Hill's Lisa Lewis, an event planner with Live It Up Events.

"This is a beautiful way to celebrate Canada and a great excuse to have a party in the winter when it's cold."

Get your party off to a great start with the right invitations.

"The invitations set the theme and tone for the party," Ms Lewis says.

"You want people to be psyched before they get there. You want the party to start fast (and) if your guests get into it before they arrive, you're guaranteed success."

One way to spice up the invite is to send personalized game tickets to your party event. Be sure to follow ticket invites with teasers and reminders via e-mail, similar to an Olympic countdown, Ms Lewis said.

Stick to a simple theme and use a general Olympic theme as a backdrop.

You can focus your party around a particular sport, such as hockey or skating or the opening or closing ceremonies.

"Pick one or two things and stick with it," Ms Lewis said. "Otherwise it becomes confusing and overwhelming for guests. If guests are doing too many things, it splits up your party."

With a hockey theme, you can host a game of table hockey during commercial breaks and decorate using mini hockey sticks and chocolate pucks.

If figure skating is more your sport, bring out old skates for decoration.

Make the event interactive, allowing guests to become judges with their own set of scorecards.

When it comes to feeding your guests, Abovo Decorating and Events owner Rita Lagree suggests bringing in international flavours.

One way to achieve an international menu is to ask guests to bring their own traditional dishes.

"Set up food stations instead of a buffet," Ms Lagree, of Newmarket, says. "You want to keep people moving and networking around the party. Sitting, they become stationary. If you have great food and atmosphere, the rest takes care of itself."

Food stations can be set up by



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Rita Lagree, owner of Abovo Decorating and Event Planning, offers tips for successful Olympic-themed parties.

country or by course, such as an appetizer station featuring hors d'oeuvres from China and Germany, the main course from Canada and desserts from France or Italy.

You can also add flare to your Olympic party by having your guests rise to the occasion and carry an Olympic torch.

"There was so much hype around the torch," Ms Lagree says. "The fact that it went through almost every town, people are feeling closer to it. People

are looking for something to be proud of and be happy about."

One way of bringing the torch to life is to paint old tiki lamps in white, gold, silver or bronze and light them in the front yard. When guests leave, they can extinguish the torches.

Plan activities to keep your guests engaged and interested, former event planner and Vaughan resident Karen Kramer says.

"It's important to create a balance of party events and to create

a comfortable environment for guests," she says. "You don't want to go over the top and put people off. The Olympic spirit is about coming together to cheer on the nation."

Organize small competitions between guests such as playing a winter sports video game.

Assign guests to specific countries.

The guest whose country receives the most medals or points during a particular event wins a prize, such as a gold medal

made from chocolate or a silver-sparkled cocktail.

"Create your own little challenges and use the Olympic sport to set the atmosphere," Ms Kramer says.

Don't let the end of the party be the end of the fun.

Send guests home with memorable party favours, such as small Canadian flags, chocolate medals or decorative cowbell clankers.

"You don't have to spend a ton of money," Ms Kramer says.

PARTY GAMES

▶ Faux figure skating — see which of your party guests has the best jumps and twirls indoors on your living room floor.

▶ Indoor hockey or curling — if space allows, create an indoor game of hockey using a sock ball and brooms.

▶ Men vs. women mini Olympics

▶ Olympic trivia

▶ Olympic Games charades

DECORATIONS

▶ Flag or Olympic rings stir sticks: colour different country flags and the Olympic rings (blue, yellow, black, green and red) design on white paper, cut the flags out and tape them to straws.

▶ Score cards: print out number zero through nine on white paper (large enough to see at a distance), cut out number leaving a small white border and paste on black construction paper. Give a set of score cards to each party guest judge and score events from your living room.

▶ Medals: attach coloured ribbon to chocolate gold coins. Make silver medals by re-wrapping chocolate coins in tin foil and use bronze-coloured gift wrap for bronze medals.

▶ Lucky Loonie floating candles: in a large glass bowl, drop a few loonies and fill with water. Place tea light candles or flameless candles on top.

▶ Olympic rings: paint hula-hoops in the Olympic colours and hang them outside.