



Jamie Dyos, owner of Soiree Valet Parking, works a cocktail party at the Legion of Honor.
Photo: Michael Macor / The Chronicle

Jamie Dyos knows ins and outs of party parking

Sam Whiting, Chronicle Staff Writer
Thursday, January 21, 2010

This is a hard-driving week for Jamie Dyos. First there was a party at the Legion of Honor, then the San Francisco Ballet opening. Dyos, 44, is president of Soiree Valet Parking Service Inc. World headquarters are above a garage housing his shuttle vans South of Market.

Q: How long has Soiree been around?

A: 20 years. It started as a single special event in Oakland. My business permit is dated Oct. 17, 1989. I started Soiree Valet two hours before the earthquake hit.

Q: Where is one of the far-flung locations you've parked cars?

A: We've been to Montana to do an event.

Q: Isn't there nothing but parking in Montana?

A: It can be a challenge. Everyone is coming in at once.

Q: Was this by chance at the mayor's wedding?

A: No, something else. I don't want to go into details.

Q: What is the toughest neighborhood for parking cars?

A: Russian Hill. You have to take the cars down to North Beach and put them in a lot.

Q: Is it true your wife had to become a parking expert?

A: She did become a parking expert. I met her (Katie McNally) at an industry party. She was an event planner.

Q: Latest project?

A: The Ballet opening (Wednesday night). It's the big event of January. We'll have 50 valets at City Hall and park 300 cars.

Q: How many cars have you lost?

A: Never lost a car.

Q: Wrecked any?

A: That's part of the business (laughs).

Q: How many sets of keys have you lost?

A: We've lost a few. We've found them, though, or we've gone to the owner's house and gotten a spare and had one made.

Q: Strangest thing you've seen in a car?

A: I don't look. I just jump in and go. The less you know, the better.

Q: What's the standard tip?

A: \$2 to \$5

Q: Where did you grow up?

A: Pittsburgh, Pa.

Q: What did you want to be?

A: An investment banker.

Q: What happened?

A: I ended up parking their cars instead. I came out here and got a job with the Flying Dutchman. It was the perfect job while you figure out what you want to do. Six months into it, I knew I could start my own company.

Q: What was the toughest lesson you had to learn?

A: How to control a stick shift on a hill. You have to hit the emergency brake and the gas and the clutch at the same time. It was trial and error.

Q: Anybody ever asked if you are old enough to drive?

A: Not lately (laughs).

Q: What do you look for in a valet?

A: Clean-cut, clean DMV, can look you in the eye when they shake your hand.

Q: Where do you live?

A: The Richmond District.

Q: You park on the street?

A: I do. It takes a couple of minutes. Keep circling and look for people with keys in their hand.

Q: Neighborhood hangout?

A: Giorgio's Pizza on Friday night. My kids love it. They're 7 and 5.

Q: Are they showing any aptitude for parking?

A: They know the valets by name, and if they're smart, they'll stay out of the parking business.

Q: Motto?

A: Keep a tight lineup in front.