

JAMIE DYOS

The Parking God

HOW TO HOST A PARTY FROM 33 ▲

Jamie Dyos has good reason to celebrate San Francisco's impossible parking situation. As too many cars vie for too few parking spots, his bottom line has surged with residents' frustration levels. As the owner and founder of Soiree Valet Parking Services, Dyos celebrated the company's 10th anniversary in October. Soiree assists over 1,000 functions a year, running with a full-time staff of four and an army of valets on call.

Soiree corners the market in special events parking. The San Francisco Opera's 75th Anniversary Gala is the company's biggest event to date; sixty valets parked cars for 1,300 guests. Corporate America fills the company coffers, but weddings and parties at private homes are special treats. Soiree recently provided valets for Bill Getty's June wedding in Oakville.

Expectations in the upper-end market are high and Dyos' services are acclaimed as among the highest quality in the city. Dyos prides his valets on details like snappy service; "Guests shouldn't wait longer than a minute or two for their cars to pull up," he says.

In fact, Dyos takes the concept of service so far that he once slipped out of jury duty to assemble an emergency team. The Asian Art Museum desperately needed valets for an 800-person event beginning in less than an hour. Via cell phone, Dyos secured the resources within minutes and finished up his courtroom duties; sure enough, he and his team were out front when the museum threw open its doors.

Because of its white glove expertise, Soiree charges a smidgen above industry



average. "If you consider what other parts of planning a party cost, having a valet company take liability for the guests' cars is a pretty good deal," says Dyos. Soiree's hourly rates are \$30 per valet during the holidays, with a \$300 minimum. Two to three nights a week Dyos suits up in white alongside his valets, parking cars and directing activity.

And where do they hide the tons of steel? Surprisingly, valets look to street parking as the preferred method. In tight neighborhoods, Soiree may rent a nearby parking lot. Other times, they shuttle valets back and forth from the host's front door to a remote parking location.

Dyos has been a resident of San Francisco for 12 years. Immediately after college graduation, he drove to California from the East Coast. He parked cars for his first job in the city and says, "I haven't stopped parking cars since." After a few months on the job, he realized there was not enough competition in the market for special events. Soiree Valet was the result; in 1989, Dyos set up shop in his Haight-Ashbury studio, where he worked

the phones during the day and unrolled a futon at night. A few years later, the company moved into its own offices.

It was a slow climb until six years ago, when business shot through the roof along with the bustling economy. The bulk of Soiree's business today comes from corporate events, particularly in the South of Market area. Internet startups are descending upon the Media Gulch in droves. "We see a lot of dot com openings and technology premieres," Dyos claims.

Dyos and his new wife Katie work side by side in Soiree's new SoMa office space. They crossed paths on "Monte Carlo Night" at a client party, when Katie was working for Hornblower Ferry and Cruises. Blackjack was the matchmaker; Katie approached Dyos at the dealer's table and appealed for help. The couple recently welcomed a golden retriever pup named Sonoma to the family. Ultimately, they dream of owning and operating a bed and breakfast in the Provence region of France. Their wish may be soon become a reality... as long as San Franciscans keep partying!

When hiring a valet company, Jamie suggests the following:

- 1 Book ahead as much as possible. The holidays are the busiest time of year, and the companies need extra time to secure valets and parking lots.
- 2 Make sure the company is insured—ask to see a certificate of insurance.
- 3 Set a realistic time frame for your party. Even if you expect guests to stay from 6-9pm, add a few hours on the tail end. Give the valet service a conservative estimate of hours so they can provide service if guests stay late.

