

Checker's Catering makes parties planet-friendly

■ Corporate and special events keep employees on their toes

By Lea Blevins
STAFF WRITER

LIVERMORE — Denise Slavitt will tell you the success of her catering business is due to high-quality food and great customer service. But there's a third piece to the puzzle that remains behind the scenes: organization.

Slavitt and her employees at Checker's Catering and Special Events have a system that keeps day-to-day operations running smoothly.

Everything gets labeled with a destination and gets triple-checked before getting delivered.

But that isn't even the most remarkable thing about the business.

Checker's was recently certified as an Alameda County Green Business and is the first catering company in the Tri-Valley to earn the honor.

"To be able to get this recognition, it's a really nice feeling," Slavitt said.

Slavitt started the business with her parents in 1988 in the Bishop Ranch Business Park in San Ramon. She holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's in business, but learned her food service experience working in restaurants throughout college.

Checker's was a small cafe and deli until the day a corporate employee called and asked if they could provide coffee for a meeting. Checker's said yes, and the catering business began.

When the company moved to its 10,000-square-foot facility in Livermore 2½ years ago, becoming a green business became a possibility.



DENISE SLAVITT, owner of Checker's Catering and Special Events (left) stands with a platter of sandwiches and bowl of salad to be served at an event. Israel Tobon (right) loads a van with food ready for delivery.



JIM STEVENS — Staff photos

Working with Waste Management and the city of Livermore, Checker's has implemented a number of environmentally responsible practices.

"It's such a good thing to do for the environment," Slavitt said.

Checker's has reduced weekly waste from 80 cubic yards to eight, partially by separating food waste for composting. The business purchases organic greens and local, pesticide-free olive oil, as well as strawberries and grapes packed in wooden boxes instead of plastic foam.

Biodegradable plates made from

sugar cane, low-flow, pre-rinse nozzles and energy-saving lighting add to the list of eco-friendly practices.

And while Slavitt and her husband, Randy Smith, facilities manager, are proud of these green techniques, they're even more proud of how the business continues to grow.

Checker's averages 40 to 60 deliveries on a weekday, mostly to corporate clients, generally providing meals for about 30 people.

The special event business picks up on the weekends, with average events

providing catering from 300 to 400 people for things such as weddings, holiday parties, birthdays and more.

Corporate deliveries typically cost about \$15 per person, with special events ranging anywhere from \$30 to \$100 per attendee.

The company's largest job so far was catering an event on the USS Hornet for 3,500 people.

It's not unusual for Checker's to cater outside the Tri-Valley. Employees often make trips to San Francisco, San Jose and even Sacramento.

The corporate catering has been

BUSINESS spotlight

going strong for years, while the special event catering is still growing. But Checker's offers full event planning for those who want it.

The business has three full-time special event planners who will coordinate everything from music and food to table settings and entertainment — even if it means hiring a stilt-walker.

"It's a business of details," Slavitt said. "There's all kinds of themes we can help people develop."

And though Slavitt runs the show from her office each day, the company's 25 full-time employees, four part-timers and 30 on-call helpers are all a part of this well-oiled machine.

Checker's has managed to retain many of its employees for years, some since the beginning. This contributes to the family-like feel, along with a large table in the kitchen where everyone eats lunch together every day — on the house.

"This is a fun place," said Jose M. Orga, who has been with the company all 18 years.

For more information on Checker's Catering and Special Events, visit www.checkerscatering.com or call (925) 968-1121.

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