



## PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS BUSINESS



### Culinary Festival Bustles With Logoed Gifts

By: [Audrey Sellers](#)

Issue: [2010apr](#)

The [BB&T Charleston Wine + Food Festival](#) is four days of food- and wine-fueled revelry, and Grand Ideas, Inc. (UPIC: Grand213) is at the heart of it all. This Charleston, South Carolina-based distributor handles all retail and non-retail merchandise, plus manages all retail sales for the Festival, helping to double the Festival's investment every year.

How does a distributor do it? With unbreakable teamwork, says President Grandee Ann Ray. "The Festival is what we call boot camp in team-building. We establish stronger relationships each year with our Festival sponsors, vendors, board members and staff," she says. "We make it fun, too. The Festival executive director believes we are part of her team and has ultimate and complete trust in us to handle the retail component of the event."

Here, Ray shares how she and her all-female staff step it up every year to make the Festival a success.

### The Planning Stages

Ray doesn't have time to catch her breath—planning for the next Festival begins during the current one. Wielding her Blackberry, Ray works her way through the Festival, noting traffic flow, attendee product requests and display ideas. "There are always improvements to be made every year," Ray says.

Within two weeks of the Festival, Ray debriefs the event's executive director. It gives them a chance to discuss what worked and what didn't, along with ideas for next year's event. Ray also completes a vendor evaluation questionnaire, which goes to the Festival's logistics and operations manager to help make improvements for the next year.

### It's Festival Time

Weeks before the actual event, Ray gathers her staff and a handful of volunteers to start sorting, organizing and transporting the products to the Festival. No detail is overlooked—Ray maps out volunteer schedules, orders linens for the retail spaces and confirms placement of electrical outlets, wireless credit card machines and cash registers.

There are three main areas for visitors to peruse merchandise: a tent designated for Grand Ideas' retail items and two smaller retail areas inside tasting tents. "We typically have four Grand Ideas team members and at least six volunteers on the 'floor' at all times throughout the Festival," says Ray, who uses a two-way radio to stay connected to her team. "We also have a floater who goes between the main tent to the smaller retail areas to make sure merchandise and cash levels are adequate."

So what kind of merchandise can shoppers pick up in the tents? Items such as customized tasting plates and wine lanyards, which come in handy as guests sample different foods and wines. They can also purchase products such as t-shirts, caps, magnets and trivets to commemorate the experience.

This merchandise isn't just for guests—Ray makes sure each Grand Ideas and Festival staff member gets a custom-embroidered t-shirt as a thank-you for working tirelessly on the event.

### Piecing It All Together

"We begin item selection in the summer months but cannot really decide on all merchandise until sponsorship dollars are finalized," Ray says. "There is much attention given to every detail of the merchandise produced. Since Festival art is replicated on so many gifts, it's a great thing our industry has improved the quality of digital and four-color process imprinting."

Ray says the most difficult aspect of taking on such a hands-on project is the amount of time it takes to make it happen. "Our other clients are not on hold. We all work long hours immediately leading up to the Festival, during the Festival and afterwards," says Ray.

But the long days of setting up merchandise tables and coordinating the Festival's products is worth it, Ray says, because the profits raised are donated to the Festival's designated charities. "It's a rewarding opportunity and we treat it as an honor to assist with this project each year," Ray says. "We have established fantastic working relationships with many of our suppliers. We absolutely couldn't do what we do without solid relationships with those who make it happen for us."