

“Only in Canada, eh?”

(Canadians pay their Brides and Grooms to party!)

...written by

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Remember back in grade school when your teacher slapped you with a pile of homework and then just for good measure, topped it off with a 1000 word essay that you knew wouldn't get done till the night before the deadline. Well, just like old times, I was assigned this project from a news magazine editor almost like a homework assignment. So, after going back to the books and burning the midnight oil, I found myself mulling over the old habits and my drudging memories of tackling a prescribed topic and turning it into a decent exposition of passable worth! Well, Professor ... here's my homework!

I have searched through myriad Wedding Books from “How to...” to “Planning the Perfect...” and “Guide to a Beautiful...” to name a few, and nowhere in my research could I find any inkling of, or reference to, a discussion on a Wedding party custom called, “Stag and Does” or “Buck and Does.” Since most of these wedding planning authors were American based, I was left to assume that this integral part of pre-Wedding Planning must surprisingly be a relevant part of the Canadian scene of nuptial preparations and therefore, must elude the American chain of events that lead up to “tying the knot”. If this is so, it's really too bad, because these parties usually involve a different kind of frivolity and purposefulness. Honestly, American Brides & Grooms are missing out on an entertaining and “rewarding” way to help them improve their financial situation prior to their Wedding send-off.

Certainly, there are numerous readings about a variety of “before-the-fact” events that can prepare the future Bride & Groom for their Big Day and Reception Extravaganza. Etiquette books and Bridal Planners list a few of these as Engagement Parties, Bachelorette/Bachelor parties, Attendants' parties, Rehearsal dinners and Wedding breakfasts, but nowhere in the literature could I find any references to the Stag (Buck) & Doe ventures that are, more-often-than-not, included in the pre-Wedding processes that are done in Canada.

First of all, the whole idea of the Stag (Buck) and Doe is to provide a party that brings together, both of the family kinships and their respective friends, for the singular circumstance of raising money for the intendeds. It's ultimate goal is to put as many friends and relatives into a situation where they will enjoy being wrapped up in the music, games and fun times so much, that the invitees will shell out a little cash as they engage in all the zany involvements that have been planned for their entertainment.

This function becomes the sole responsibility of the Best Man and his partner, the Maid (Matron) of Honour. They plan a complete party presentation that will generate the fun, social interactions, gaming opportunities and dance components for the whole evening. All the important aspects of this party have to be put in place, well in advance, in order for the party to come off without a hitch. Money and time are huge factors in making this event turn out to be a profitable one. The best man (and/or best lady) is responsible for paying for all of the costs that are associated with the Stag and Doe. You might ask, “Why, in anyone's right mind, would they step up to the plate and take responsibility for such an expensive risk?” It's simple – if it works, there is a tremendous PAY OFF for the two nuptials and this can result in a wonderful extension to their honeymoon or easier living plans in the near future. Let's see what our two Best People need to do, in order to insure that the results of their efforts are grossly “in the black” instead of dripping in “red ink.” Below is a list of the preparatory duties that must be considered and readied for such a party to be a success in more ways than one!

THE BEST MAN/ BEST LADY:

These folks must be go-getters of the first order! They are running a gamble in this venture and need to do some very significant preparations and follow-up work to pull this event off successfully. They must plan the actual operation of the party into time and action segments that blend the interaction of the attendees, the equipment, the events, and the food and beverages into a wonderful, multi-faceted jubilee! They must make the phone calls to advertise the function and develop the entry tickets for the guests to purchase. These tickets are paid for in

advance so that a cash commitment is established, so the BEST PEOPLE will have a cushion or “float” for the purchase or payment of UP-FRONT NEEDS and EXPENSES. These costs are numerous - the hall, the Dj (or band), the food, the prizes, the game rentals, and the alcohol to name a few things. These two special leaders must also obtain the assistance of some dedicated friends and/or relatives who will act as helpers for many of the occurrences and activities during the evening of fun. These early pre-planning and set up strategies can, without any doubts, make or break the whole event. When this phase is done well and these properly established mechanisms are put into place, the chances for success rise significantly.

THE HALL:

The hall should be secured well in advance of the date of the Stag and Doe. It should be a place that provides ample room for the number of guests that will be invited and have enough parking facilities and operational space for all the events that will take place during the party. Choosing the right spot may involve considering a kitchen, an enclosed bar area, appropriate table and seating requirements and of course, special attention to the division of “people space” for games, socializing and dancing opportunities. The more central the location of the hall (in the locality) to the invited guests can also be a factor in the turn out that comes to enjoy the fun!

THE LIQUOR LICENCE:

There is, in Canada, a requirement by law that states a liquor licence must be applied for and received by the licensee prior to hosting any party that involves alcoholic beverages. In most cases this licence takes up to six weeks to pretty well guarantee the obtaining of such a permission from the government to sell Liquor and Beer at any function. Considering this time frame into the planning is sometimes forgotten and a furious rush and worry period ensues in order to meet party deadlines and financial pre-payments. In Canada, there are special circumstances or boundaries that are written into the licence for the party to be legal and controlled. These requirements should be posted for all your guests to see and abide by, so that no dangerous or criminal events can spoil all the hard work that is about to unfold.

THE MUSIC MAKER(S):

The music at Stag & Does tends to be “a background enticement” rather than an entertainment provocateur. There are so many things taking place during the short time frame of this party that dancing is not always the first thing on partiers’ minds. The music is mainly of a genre that keeps feet tapping and mouths sipping and yapping away to the treats and temptations that are being presented around the whole room. Socializing is a big part of the event. Games keep guests wrapped up in intrigue and passion. Ticket sales, food, drinks, raffles, announcements, challenges and so on are all competing with the Music Man who is keeping the tunes upbeat and suggestive to any possible dancers who just can’t hold themselves back from shakin’ it out!

Consideration of cost for this entertainment specialty depends on the choices made by the “best people” who make the decisions for the evening. A small band, a Disc Jockey or a home entertainment unit with a private music library can be used to provide the tunes for the event. A Disc Jockey is the norm for these functions because he/she carries in his arsenal of equipment and skills, a whole repertoire of flexibilities that make him a valuable singularity within the program. Disc Jockeys usually have a huge variety of music that can service the full range of tastes that attend Stag & Does. Disc Jockeys’ M.C’ing abilities can be put to good use and take some of the burden off the “help staff,” which is already charged with specific duties. Disc Jockeys also provide interactive and directive components to the festivities that energize the guests into trying all aspects of the party agenda.

THE HELP:

The “Best Man/Lady” should commandeer lots of help in order to make this party a successful and profitable venture. They will need ticket sellers, entry receivers, games controllers, food providers and servers, bartenders (professional or amateurs), Master/Mistress of Ceremonies (Dj, if desired), and clean up crew. Make sure that these critical folks are in place and well versed on their functional role in the evening’s presentation. As time passes and events come and go, each and every one of your “workers” should know how and when to get into the action. The co-ordination of all of these people under the direction of the “best people” will make the “service” part of the party a negligible worry for the hosts and a lucrative occasion for the special couple!

THE GAMES:

Just like at a mid-way at a fair, or at a casino opportunity, the games can range from old stand-bys to some pretty esoteric or preposterous activities. It seems the crazier they are, the more active and spontaneous, the participants become. Check out just a few of the possibilities that I mention below.

- 1) There is no shyness when it comes to having a lady pick up a hammer and nail (spike) and smack away trying to see how many “whacks” it takes to totally embed the nail into a tree stump (or 4 X 4)! (Safety glasses are mandatory here!)
- 2) Inviting a fortune-teller to locate her booth in the corner of the hall and tell guests their future storylines could be another strange way to produce chatter and laughter. Of course, a portion of the fee for this service could be turned over to the future Bride & Groom.
- 3) Still another oddity could be the auctioning off the “groomsmen” to perform chores or an escort to an event in the future. It could mean the “grooms people” might have to provide a service of housework or chauffeuring, etc. to the highest bidder in the call-off!
- 4) The old regulars, like Crown & Anchor, Black Jack, and Roulette are very popular at Stag & Does because they are simple to set up and run by folks who have been exposed to these types of games over the years.
- 5) Fifty/Fifty draws; Raffles and Glass Turkeys (26 or 40 oz. bottles of booze) can be offered for ticket sales and then used in a Lottery Draw at pre-determined points in the party.

Many of these games involve some kind of cost to the Best Man and Lady and the whole idea of this event is to reduce expenses and relay all profits to the Bride & Groom. So, when left up to the ingenuity of the Wedding Party and Relatives, a whole list of cost-free activities could be put into the fun time part of the party.

- 6 A graffiti poster that receives “one’s best wishes” or “another’s best piece of advice” or “someone else’s true graffiti comment” could be placed in a prominent place on a special table or on a wall mounting.
- 7) Consider setting up a video camera in the corner of the room for guests to give the lovebirds either their “best wishes” or “best advice.” Of course, charge a small fee for the right to leave their “impressionable” mark on the tape.
- 8) Along a similar line (and charge), you could provide your guests with special, dedicated cards on which secret messages could be written. These cherished notes could then be placed in a solid, locked container that would be put away for 20 or 25 years. After this lengthy period of time, the Bride & Groom would then open the vault, remove the “TIME CAPSULE” and read all the special wishes that their many friends had offered to them way back in the beginning of their journey through life.

A couple of relatively easy, low cost events for the taking, are the next two samples. In the first case, just make sure the “case” is small and in the second case, designate the prize by advertising it next to the box from which they extract the “snipped” playing card as they come through the doorway and submit their entry ticket.

- 9) Simply obtain an old, small, suitcase and have its total space filled with pennies and provide a challenge for all the guests to guess the combined value of the money and the container. The winning guest goes home with suitcase of money!
- 10) Another option you could use, would be to prepare a deck (or two) of playing cards that can be cut up into various slices and then mixed up well and then handed to arriving guests as they come in the door to start the party. When the signal is given, the guests must find the matching pairs, triads or quads to become winners of special prizes that are designated for this idea!

The list of options in this phase of the program is open to the imagination and humour of the party designers. Believe me when I say, “the sky’s the limit!”

THE FOOD:

For the most part, food can be handled in one of three ways. The first one is usually not done, but it could be an option if the costs were a burden to the Wedding Party or the Bride and Groom.

The Pot Luck Style of food preparation and presentation is a simple, and inexpensive way of feeding a guest list with minimum effort and worry for the party hosts. The guests are required to bring some kind of food serving to the party and have it placed on the buffet table for the line up of hungry guests to help themselves when the time comes to “fill ‘er up!”

More often than not, the “Home” Team prepares a banquet of food possibilities that present a buffet to the guests. It contains all the staple components of a well-prepared PICNIC MENU. Salads, breads, cold meats, casseroles, condiments, relishes, vegetable plates and so on are pre-made and “trucked in” for the feast at the appointed time. This, in itself is a huge labour of love for the family members of the Bride & Groom. Someone (usually the Bride’s mother) takes over the leadership of the acquisition of helpers and the shopping for all the ingredients to pull this table display off!

Lastly, to save time, the Best Man/Lady, can concede to the wishes of the tired and overworked “Inner Team” and choose to cater in the foodstuffs. At this point, the menu can go from simple food fare to elaborate platters decked out in artistic displays and tastes. So, will it be pizza and pastries, delicate gourmet trifles, or finger foods with sauces and “dip”ables. Whatever your choice, it should be mentioned that food presentation should be considered as an early commitment to your guests. They have probably been drinking and it is always a wise move to provide your guests with a food and coffee buffer to the evening’s events that included the in-take of alcohol that was happily consumed by friends and relatives.

THE PRIZES:

Since the guests are invited to this celebration for the purpose of parting with “some” of their hard earned “dough,” it makes it a wise necessity to obtain some gifts and prizes that will honour some of the patrons with awards for their attendance and contributions to the Wedding coffers. There should be a full range of rewards in place and these prizes can be obtained by donations from certain guests, companies or businesses or simply purchased at department stores and so forth. Great cost need not be the prime directive in attaining these gifts. People like to win anything! If it’s free ... it’s fun! It just helps to symbolize “success” and “individuality” within the party time frame. You all know what I mean, “Hey look at me ... I just won a Ronald MacDonald Wrist Watch!”

The list is endless. Baseball caps, T-shirts, fruit baskets, Timex watches, gift certificates, movie tickets are just a few of the possibilities that make up the medium level of prizes. A 13” colour TV, Glass turkeys, a weekend getaway, or a foursome golf game could be bigger samples of awards. The main thing is to mix things up and provide enough small, medium and big gifts to warrant the time and expense that your guests are spending on your special party. People will be enticed to support your Stag & Doe intentions if you show them that they are mainly there to enjoy themselves and celebrate your upcoming Wedding. Having a good base of prizes and gifts will give them a better reason to open the purse strings more easily and often. Just make sure that you position the contests and accompanying prizes evenly throughout the program and always save the “biggies” for finale situations!

DRESS:

This is the simplest topic to discuss. Usually, unless otherwise specified by the hosts, the dress is casual and comfortable. Come dressed to interact with your good friends and those neighbours who are seated at the next table to you. Any sort of formal or dressy attire would certainly put you at a social disadvantage! Remember, you’re there to talk, dance and play! The Stag & Doe party atmosphere is generally for the free-spirited, fun-loving type of folks who enjoy letting their hair down and getting their hands into things. There is usually a full range of gaming and active enticements to challenge sporting individuals with the lure of spinning wheels or physical participation. Having comfortable and sporty clothing is a must. No need to loosen the neckties here ... just the pocket books, please!

THE CRESCENDO:

Now, all the party hosts have to do is put all of these ideas together and become the directors of traffic and topics. Arrive an hour or two early with some of your set up crew and start to decorate the hall elegantly or simplistically, whichever is the case. Put all the game activities (which you’ve had picked up earlier) in place in strategic locations that will allow guests to participate at their leisure, a reasonable distance away from the dancing and socializing areas. Instruct the Dj to play energizing tunes that will provide background motivation to enjoy all facets of the party fare. Set your helpers, who have been trained in their jobs, to readying themselves for the onslaught of guests. Keep the food in refrigerated conditions (unless catered) until the later part of the evening when it will be

served in a buffet style presentation. The Best Man and Lady should make themselves appear as an active presence about the room, throughout the evening, in order to act as “welcoming and doting hosts” on behalf of the Special Couple. The Best man and Lady do all of this to allow the Bride and Groom to mingle with and ingratiate their guests who have honoured them with their attendance. After all, it’s the guests who are doing all of this pay-as-you-play partying for the opportunity to do a little extra for their cherished friends. Permit the intendeds to circulate and enjoy the company and the levity of this loose and happy occasion!

Stag and Does are Canada’s way to support our Brides and Grooms prior to the Big Day. We make this party a special one that mixes many of the old and new ways to entertain people we love. Unlike a Wedding, where things tend to be regimented by custom and circumstance, the Stag and Doe is an unpretentious way to get guests who range in age, stature, health, wealth and humour to grab a beer and let loose for a few hours of joy and release! And above all, it pays the Bride and Groom to party with their loved ones!

Cheers!
The “Groovy Guy”

For further information on this topic, please contact J. Douglas Scott at ... doug@absolutelygroovydjs.org .