



Fall 2004

# NAAFEM

in print



**Cover Story...**

## **Curing The Installation Blues 16**

*Tangled up in installation blues? Partners from every channel in the supply chain weigh in with their best-fix ideas for improving the process.*

## **Refining Your Pallet 22**

*A primer of key questions to ask suppliers to ensure the most efficient shipping pallets for the best price.*

## **Anatomy Of... 28**

*Vendor Audits. More of your customers – and not just the big guys – are taking a magnifying glass to your business to ensure you can provide the price and service they demand.*

## A DAY AT THE RACES



**Here's a reservation to beat them all:  
6,000 well-heeled customers are coming  
for breakfast, lunch and all-day snacking.  
*Are you ready?***

By Martha O'Connell

The May Saturday of the Preakness Stakes climaxed with 112,668 intense fans screaming as the horses pounded to the finish line. Foodservice staffers joked that there was sure a lot of preparation work for a two-minute race.

The day marked the second jewel in horseracing's Triple Crown and called for high-class parties with superb service and food. Internationally, \$87 million in wagers was on the line and Baltimore's Pimlico Race Course was in the spotlight. The event is Maryland's premier sporting event and the all-day celebration posed a Herculean foodservice feat.

To pull it off, Maryland Turf Caterers, which has foodservice rights at the track, hired Corporate Chef Sean Sims, CFSP, to oversee the two classiest parties. Sims is a veteran. He supervised four Preakness galas before and every year they just keep getting bigger. He is corporate chef of US Food

Safety, LLC, a company specializing in safety training and certifications.

"I envisioned a quality event with people spending a lot of money and expecting a quality show," says Brian Handleman, president of Maryland Turf Caterers. "And that's what I got."

Sims was responsible for foodservice at Corporate Village, where 17 individual corporate tent parties took place, and at Turfside Terrace, which was open to the public at \$250 a head. Both were located next to the finish line – the horseracing world's equivalent of being on the 50-yard line at the Super Bowl. Throughout the day, both parties entertained a combined 6,000 people.

Pimlico runs an array of other foodservice options for guests, but these parties are the top of the line and cost more than \$1 million to throw. They are, essentially, upscale picnics with guests dressed to the nines.

"The biggest challenge overall is simply the scope of the menu," says Sims. "Think of about 15 acres of

parties and one central kitchen. I'm guessing it's the biggest lunch rush short of Vegas."

Planning began several months in advance and culminated during race week when kitchen staff started preparing food on the Monday prior to Saturday's race. Throughout the week, foods such as sauces, vegetables, crostinis, dips, cookies and salads were completed on a staggered schedule, determined by how long they could hold safely until race day. On race day, 54,710 portions of hot food were cooked. As might be expected, a good portion of the menus' ingredients were ordered pre-washed and/or pre-cut to very precise specifications in advance.

Race day includes five services – breakfast basket, starters, main course, dessert and after snack. Menus at the Turfside Terrace and Corporate Village were extremely different.

Turfside Terrace offered a Maryland-style beef picnic, which required 680 pounds of heavily-marinated top sirloin

and 900 pounds of tenderloin, both nicely charred on the outside and almost medium rare inside. Fried chicken, honey ham, bourbon baked beans, coleslaw, red skinned dill potato salad, Apple Brown Bettys and accompaniments also were available. Six buffet lines accommodated guests.

The Corporate Village served up an abundant selection of high-end food befitting the occasion. Thirty-two different dishes were offered throughout the day in 17 private parties. Twenty-nine buffets ran simultaneously.

Tradition dictated two items were menu-musts: Maryland crab cakes and Black-Eyed Susans, the official Preakness drink named after the state flower.

Unexpected problems cropped up and Sims had to solve them quickly. In one instance, he was surprised to find 900 pounds of crabmeat frozen and had to have it safely thawed (which took four to six hours) and then mixed in 2½ hours for the staff to produce 7,000 crab cakes.

### Equipped for Volume

Food was prepared in a 5,600-sq.-ft. temporary central commissary on site. Equipment was chosen to facilitate mass production and comply with HACCP food safety standards.

Among the key pieces were four double stack convection ovens for banquet quantities of food, a 160-quart

steam kettle, 160-quart tilt skillet, two fryers, four six-foot gas charrills, one prep sink, one pot sink, two hand sinks and two power generators. Three 43-foot refrigerated trailers and one refrigerated box van helped handle cold food storage.

Food was served on china with silverware utensils. Serving platters included high-end Italian ceramics, pewter, silver chafing dishes and polished samovars.

To pull off the event, about 300 employees and contractors helped during the week and on race day by accomplishing an array of tasks such as hooking up water, overseeing the equipment installation, preparing food and serving it in tuxedo dress.

"Everybody had an assignment," Handleman says. "Everybody knew where to go to pick up food. The problem is just that it happens all at once. It gets a little harried. That's when you can start getting a little overwhelmed."

An event of this magnitude called for an independent inspector dedicated solely to food safety. Edward Sherwin, FMP, was hired to ensure HACCP food safety rules were followed. To do that, he constantly tested food temperatures, scrutinized preparation and monitored related issues such as water supply, OSHA rules and electrical supply.

A huge party like this doesn't go off without a hitch, and Sims had to

troubleshoot. Sure enough, problems with procurement and item delivery occurred and preparation schedules had to be changed at the last minute.

"Even though we work a set schedule, there are a lot of variables and changes in products. You've got to be flexible and be able to move around your production lists. That was extremely challenging this year," says Sims. "But if you look at these challenges as obstacles, a party this size will kill you."

This year's Preakness weather was sunny in the 80's and that meant refrigeration and maintaining proper temperatures were critical. Handleman says the food staff took extra care monitoring the length of time food sat out and put smaller quantities of food on service platters. All buffets and bars had to be well stocked with ice and water.

"The challenges and frustrations are outweighed by the success of the event," says Sims. "About two or three o'clock on Saturday when the lunch rush was winding down, I looked around at the sheer mass of people and the level of foodservice we do at the event and it gave me a great sense of satisfaction to be a part of it."

"We always get raves from our guests about the quality of these events. It takes a heck of a team to make that happen," says Handleman. ☐



### At A Glance

**Event:** The Preakness Stakes, May 15

**Operator:** Maryland Turf Caterers; Corporate Chef Sims, US Food Safety, LLC

**Location:** Pimlico Race Course, Baltimore

**Foodservice venues:** Corporate Village and Turfside Terrace, among others

**Numbers fed at these venues:** 6,000

**Menu:** Upscale picnic with breakfast, main course, dessert and snack service

**Equipment:** 5,600-sq.-ft. tented temporary commissary kitchen with banquet equipment, refrigerated trucks