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 GRADUATION celebrations

Communicating with boys
 requires more than words



COLUMBUS parent
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 Saturday, May 5,
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 OFFICIAL GUIDE INSIDE

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...ation may include the completion of a student's coursework but also represents the bridging from one chapter of a student's life to another.

Parties that celebrate this rite of passage can be as simple as an intimate gathering with close family and friends or as all-encompassing as a neighborhood blowout with caterers and entertainers.

Regardless of the scale, most graduation parties require some degree of preparation and thought. Though some start thinking up to four months in advance, others plan on the fly. There are some simple steps you can take to host one that both you and your child will look back on with fond memories.

The key to a successful party is to allow the graduate to choose celebration details such as location, size and menu, said Ginger Venable, coauthor of *Graduation: Celebrate with Style! The Graduation Planning Guide*.

"We really encourage you to do what the graduate wants," Venable said. "They are the guest of honor. If the child tells you he doesn't want the party to be a big deal, listen. A small group of 15 for dinner is appropriate if that's what the graduate wants."

Kelly Galindo, owner of FunPrint Events, a themed children's party-planning service, agrees even a kindergarten or elementary graduation party would benefit from the input of the graduate.

"Talk to the child," Galindo said. "It's important to consider the needs of the guest of honor. Each of my parties is very individualized — the theme and personalization are key."

When you and your child begin discussing a location, consider the many available options.

Though most people host parties in their homes, Venable suggests parks, country clubs and banquet halls as refreshingly different atmospheres. These locales help parents or hosts avoid the

... reason people want to have parties at Pump It Up.

"People of all ages can have fun. All you have to do is send out the invitations, show up and have a grand ol' time," Sheppard said.

Magic Mountain Fun Center boasts two Columbus-area locations. Parties include private rooms with pizza as well as arcade games, bumper cars, putt-putt golf, go-karts, laser tag and activities for all ages.

"We've had some graduating kindergarten classes, which generally include a pizza party and activity," said Kevin Denny, director of marketing for Magic Mountain.

"One middle school does an overnight party and has for about six years now. It's a chance for all of them to be together and have fun before they leave to become freshmen at the high school," Denny said.

And, the location — onsite or at home — can either make or break a budget.

Galindo suggests anyone planning a party create a financial plan and stick to it.

"It's so much easier if they have a budget and a plan," she said. "The best way to stay under budget is to shop around and research. Get a notebook and keep track of costs and ideas."

Consider teaming up with another graduate's family to combine the festivities. You both will save because you can split the costs and many party supplies are sold in bulk.

The average Midwestern graduation party costs \$1,200 — \$700 of that is for food, according to *Graduation: Celebrate with Style!* Venable's No. 1 suggestion to stay under budget is don't overestimate the amount of food. For example, if it's an open house, guests might have already eaten at other parties and will not be as hungry.

Kathy Wood, mother of two recent



Photo courtesy of Posh Party Box

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Columbus graduates, hosted both parties in her backyard. She made half of the food herself and hired a caterer to do the rest.

"It was just stressful getting the food and everything done that day," she said. "Ask for help. You can't do everything yourself, and definitely take the day off if you're working."

By hiring or soliciting help from others, you'll have time to mingle and take photos instead of constantly worry-

ing if your guests are comfortable.

Most importantly, plan the party as you and the graduate see fit.

"Be different," Venable said. "You don't have to feel pressured to do the same thing as your neighbor or sister. Be original."

Originality in gifts, decorations, theme and location create a party that's special for the graduate.

"The best gifts are meaningful and useful for someone going off to college," Venable said.

A memorable gift need not be expensive. Monogrammed towels or embroidered laundry bags are functional gifts that can be used in the dorm at school and only cost between \$10 and \$20.

Whatever style or size of party, remember to keep the graduate's preferences in mind, and try not to get too caught up in the stresses of planning, rather enjoy the experience.

"We had fun," Wood said. "We were glad when it was over with — but we had fun."

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