

FUN FOOD

Candy buffets, mobile kitchens and theme-based food do the trick at mitzvahs, bar or bat.

By Carlo Wolff

It's not surprising to learn that when it comes to mitzvah food, there's a gender difference.

For the girls, the baseline is sweetness. For the boys, the key concept is sports. That's the consensus of three experts in b'nai mitzvah food trends: Elisabeth Sapell, owner of All City Candy in Richmond Heights; Christine Krause, director of marketing, advertising and digital development for Executive Caterers at Landerhaven in Mayfield Heights; and Matt West, owner of the East Side-based "mobile mini doughnut mini kitchen," DonutLabCleveland.

Besides choice of food, what's also important in a mitzvah is theme. As Krause says, theme dictates the choice of food. And as all three attest, sweetness can almost be a theme itself.

"The big trend in bar/bat mitzvahs is a candy buffet," says Sapell. "Candy bar, candy buffet, whatever you want to call it." Most such events are themed, and people use their "candy bar buffets as sort of a giveaway," she says, eliminating "buying stuff

that's not going to get used." Candy is cost-efficient; leftovers are not a problem.

Candy bars "don't get wasted," Sapell notes, "and they make everybody smile and be happy, even adults taking treats home for themselves or for the kids."

Color is critical, too, particularly for girls who may favor pink, say, if they're enjoying a bat mitzvah themed to tap dance or ballet. These days, color - like so many other aspects of mitzvahs - can be customized, Sapell says. You can get M&Ms in designer colors so you don't spend money on colors you don't want. You can get "shiny and sparkly" jellybeans - or, if "somebody's doing a bar mitzvah theme that has a different era-type theme – themes are big for any event these days - they'll come up with old-time candies." Candy centerpieces and dedicated tables are common,

Expanding on Sapell, candy seems to rule for bat mitzvahs no matter the theme or decor, suggests Executive Caterers' Krause. "If it's a girl, it can be fashion," she

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Christine Krause, director of marketing, advertising and digital development for Executive Caterers at Landerhaven



says, so the focus of the celebration could be "a cake with fashion in it as a centerpiece."

If candy is the girls' hook, sliders and hot dogs reel in the boys, according to Krause. "The food trend for bar-bat mitzvah often follows a theme, so if for example you have a mitzvah with a boy who's a sports fan you're going to have a sports theme," serving those miniature burgers with stadium mustard "to make it more sports-like." Hot dogs also work, say, for a bar mitzvah with a Tribe theme.

Unusual décor and displays, accented by foosball tables or miniature golf stations, distinguish bar mitzvahs, she says, noting one way to customize a golf-themed bar mitzvah is to place golf balls inside cup cakes. Other mitzvah hits are miniature potato pancakes, popcorn bars and stations, and "anything on a stick."

One of the hottest items is the cake pop, a circular piece of cake surrounded by icing, with a stick put through it "so you eat it like a lollipop," Krause says. "You can theme those cake pops to be colorful, to be girly, to be masculine. It can be any way you want to do it. With a donut bar, it's the same thing. Your donuts can be sprinkled any way you want."

Or you can make doughnuts out of strawberry shortcake, as Matt West does. The Cleveland Heights man specializes in doughnuts made on the spot. Like a food truck – Executive Caterers has one - his "mobile kitchen" is a bar and bat mitzvah hit, he says, both for what he sells and for the food trailer itself.

"My variety that's the most popular are my cinnamon-sugar doughnuts,"West says. "What really qualifies mine as a special product is that it's made literally seconds before you eat it. When you get the bags, they're still steaming hot. You can't normally go into a doughnut shop and get one that's just come out of the fryer. It's the freshest possible thing you can get."

One of his hottest mitzvah items is a strawberry shortcake dressed with whipped cream and fresh, chopped strawberries, he says.

But it's not just the fare that makes Donut Lab so popular at bar and bat mitzvahs, it's the vehicle itself.

"In the catering that I do, I see a lot of food trucks coming in," says the Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada native, who moved to Cleveland in 1998. "People love seeing what they've already seen on TV when they have a real food truck come." BB

