

## Career Profile

### Megan Harris, Professional Event Planner



Parents or teachers would rarely say to a child: "I think you should be an event planning professional when you grow up". Megan Harris, a 2000 History WLU graduate, thinks it's an excellent field for teachers and parents to encourage youth to pursue! Currently holding the position of Director, Events for the Greater Kitchener Waterloo Chamber of Commerce, Megan finds that the networking opportunities and relationships she has cultivated through this extroverted profession have been exceptionally rewarding.

As a professional event planner, Megan wears many hats. She is responsible for overseeing all events, conferences, tradeshow, and large meetings that occur through the Chamber of Commerce. This involves monitoring all logistics, marketing, communications (including media), sponsorship issues and execution. On a day to day basis, she is in constant contact with hotels, vendors, reading banquet event orders, managing registration for events, producing marketing materials, maintaining the website and ensuring that information is distributed to members in a timely manner. Needless to say, Megan relies on her blackberry!

After completing a general BA in History, Megan continued to have very little career direction. She started out in the golf industry through summer positions, but wasn't sure she wanted to remain in that industry forever. From there, she moved into Human Resources where she discovered it was not a fit for because the job was far too isolated and did not provide enough teamwork. Following this career learning moment, she moved back into the sports industry through managing a golf program for women called Links For Women Golf Schools with the Powerpoint Group and Score Golf. These job transitions are what coincidentally introduced her to the world of events. Megan came to discover that the event management field was a natural fit for her given her passion for meeting and interacting with new people. Although her position is very stressful given the fast pace and constant thread of high profile events she co-ordinates (including Kitchener-Waterloo's Business Excellence Awards Gala that hosts over 900 of KW 's business professionals per year), Megan also notes that she enjoys and thrives on the high action, deadline-driven environment.

Megan suggests that if you are interested in pursuing or learning more about the event planning profession, you should evaluate whether you are naturally an outgoing person and brush up on your networking etiquette skills. Wherever possible, it is wise to involve yourself in event-related volunteer initiatives and become familiar with industry terms like "critical path planning", which is a fancy word for a "to-do list" in the event planning world. One trend in the field Megan noted is that everyone wants to run an event for their business - "lawyers, banks, foundations, you name it. The community at large is becoming overwhelmed by events and we are starting to cannibalize each other with it." The challenges and excitement rest with developing unique event ideas and ensuring a creative and strategic marketing plan.

Some resources to assist you with learning more about the event planning industry include Meeting Professionals International and the International Special Events Society:

- [www.mpitoronto.org/main.cfm?cid=118](http://www.mpitoronto.org/main.cfm?cid=118)
- [www.ises.com](http://www.ises.com)