

"Best program not included in any of the above categories"

Shomrei Torah Synagogue Men's Club, West Hills, CA

Kung Pao Comedy Night

A Not So Silent Night

The Shomrei Torah Men's Club had a problem: how to program a reoccurring year-end activity when New Year's Eve fell on Shabbat. The club's traditional formal dinner dance couldn't be held - at least not on New Year's Eve.

The clearest date on the calendar was December 25th. It was a day off of work for everyone and there would be no nighttime competing events at the shul. It didn't seem quite right to have a New Year's Eve Party, though.

We asked ourselves: what do Jews do on Christmas? Historically, they eat Chinese food and go to funny movies. Thus was born the idea of a Kung Pao Comedy Night -- featuring catered Kosher Chinese food and a live comedy show by Jewish comedians. The committee soon came to realize that most professional comedians do not get booked on Christmas night since many clubs are closed; so it's often easier (and less expensive) to book them for alternate venues.

We also predicted that the event would appeal both within the congregation and to the surrounding community - and we were right.

The initial buzz was so strong within the club that planning for it became a collaborative effort between veteran and new STS Men's Club members, many of whom came forward to volunteer for the very first time. Subcommittees focused on contacting and securing comedians who were affordable and available, menu/catering coordination, promotion/publicity, securing auction prizes, and logistics, including arranging for the use of special lighting and sound system to create a nightclub-like setting for the comedians. The planning began six months in advance, but the actual work was accomplished in three. Like the ballpark in FIELD OF DREAMS, it was a case of "if you build it, they will come!"

In order to generate a buzz for the event, we posted a banner on the synagogue's double-sided billboard (located at the shul's driveway entrance) and had blurbs in the calendar sections of local newspapers and on local and Jewish websites. When ticket sales picked up and congregants started booking entire tables of eight or ten for their friends and families, our committee realized that December 25th was going to be a not so silent night! However, silence played a

part in the evening's plan: a silent auction, along with a Chinese auction, was added for additional fund-raising purposes.

For catering, we learned many things. In addition to a menu consisting of orange chicken, beef with broccoli, Chinese chicken salad, chow mein, mixed vegetables and chicken with cashews-all cooked by Michael Cohen and Majestic Caterers-we found an outside Kosher vendor to mail-order custom fortune cookies with witty Jewish sayings. For staffing, many of us rolled up our sleeves and took turns to decorate, set-up all the tables and the open bar, serve the food, buffet style, run the auctions, work the lights and sound, and clean-up.

The silent auction consisted of sports and movie memorabilia, gift baskets and certificates for various restaurants and other goods and services. Proceeds from the silent auction were specifically earmarked for helping send STS Men's Club members to this year's International Convention. The decision to have a silent auction and Chinese auction was a key factor in this event turning out to be both a *fun-raiser* and a fundraiser. In fact, the event netted a profit of almost \$3500 for the STS Men's Club, with over 50% of the profit coming from the auctions.

Our break-even head count was 102. We more than doubled that. On December 25th, 2004, nearly 250 attendees had a *fantabulous* time, enjoying the food, and laughter, and buying tickets for the silent auction and Chinese raffle.

The three comedians booked for this special gig were the main event. Mark Schiff, Steve Mittleman and Jerry Diner had the crowd laughing hysterically. They were so funny..."how funny were they?"...They were so funny that several people were spotted doubled over from laughing so hard for so long. The Men's Club had done it: we successfully produced a new, unique event and generated a handsome profit to help send guys to Convention.

Our men's club also experienced a side-benefit from producing this event: the development of members into officers. Several of the new members who volunteered to produce the event or coordinated a key subcommittee became noticeably more active with the club, attending subsequent meetings and participating in other events. In fact, for our 2005-06 men's club board, the new Programming VP and Parliamentarian come from this experience.

The STS Men's Club is already planning an encore Kung Pao Comedy Night this year. We're shooting for 300 people at \$40-\$50 per person. This is a fun event that most active clubs could emulate for their own synagogues. And that's no laughing matter.

Here is one of the first e-mails to Michael Cohen re the event.

Date: 6/25/2004
To: Michael Cohen, Majestic Caterers
Cc: Ignacio Enbom, STS Men's Club
Stephen Levine, STS Men's Club
From: Charlie Carter
RE: Event Proposal for Men's Club

Hi Michael,

This month, the STS Men's Club has been engaged in developing our calendar of events for the next 18 months, and integrating it into the overall shul calendar that Aaron Levinson coordinates. Since there will be no New Year's Eve Party this year due to Shabbos, Men's Club has been looking to fill that void with another fun event.

A great idea for such a program has been suggested by Men's Club Board Member Stephen Levine: **Kung Pao Comedy Night with Raffle and Auction.** We envision having a Chinese food buffet cooked by Majestic Caterers, one or more Jewish comedians to entertain, and a raffle and auction. However, it's become quickly evident that there are virtually no Saturday nights available to utilize Raffle Hall for a long time to come.

Submitted for your feedback and suggestions is the proposal that Men's Club produces a Kung Pao Comedy Night with Raffle and Auction on Saturday night, December 25th, 2004. This plays nicely into one-half of the age-old stereotype that on this day Jews eat Chinese food and go to the movies!

Realizing the significance of this holiday date for your staff, Men's Club is prepared to provide "mench-power" to you for advanced table set-up, and event day duties like bartending, getting the food out on the tables, and dishwashing/clean-up.

While there are other logistical issues that would need to be worked through with Aaron (i.e. building security), without Majestic's Kung Pao, clearly the Comedy is not Kosher! I look forward to hearing from you. My daytime work number is 310-206-2851 and home number is 818-592-0595.

Yours truly,

Charlie Carter

Here is the e-mail with detailed report.

From Levine, Stephen
Sent: Friday, December 17, 2004 10:48 AM
To: Ignacio Enbom (E-mail); Charlie Carter (E-mail)
Subject: Report re Kung Pao Comedy Night

1. Comedians: Marty has confirmed all comedians: Mark Schiff (www.markschiff.com), Steve Mittleman (<http://www.stevemittleman.com>) and Jerry Diner (<http://www.thecomedybook.com/Bookings/Diner.htm>) They are being comped for dinner and will provide us with a 'guest list' for a few of their friends who will be comped for the show. Aaron-please make sure we are using latest flyer in the glass cases-the earlier flyer had some typos including the misspelling of Mittleman. thanks.
2. Physical Logistics
 - a. Stool: Marty will bring a stool for the Comedians from home.
 - b. Water: Stephen will make sure they have cold bottled water.
 - c. Riser: The riser will be used in front of the stage.
 - d. Lighting & Sound System: Jeff Goshen will be providing us with light and sound system-he will need to set that up on Friday.
 - e. Tables: As there will be the standard (Kiddish) luncheon on Saturday, the tables will be set up after that by Michael's staff.
 - f. Table cloths: Ignacio to get from Sisterhood.
 - g. Jewish Fortune Cookies: ordered and arrived-will need to be placed on tables before event.
 - h. Paper goods-already purchased-settings will need to be placed on tables, cups on tables and the bar; and plates at the buffet.
 - i. Party poppers: I am going to Chinatown this weekend to see if I can purchase these.
 - j. Centerpieces: I will purchase something simple this weekend such as a smiley face etc.
 - k. Seating Arrangements: Although we said open seating, many people requested to be seated with specific couples so we are assigning seating. I thought it would be fun to give each table a name of a famous Jewish Comedian (and a number) such as Henny Youngman, Marx Bros, Jerry Lewis, Billy Crystal, Milton Berle, etc
3. Publicity.
 - a. Flyers: were sent out with this month's Shofar and have been posted as STS.
 - b. Poster: has been in foyer of STS for last few weeks.
 - c. Signage: banner was placed outside in front of STS almost 2 weeks ago.

d. E-mail: Harvey has us listed in e-newsletter and has sent out separate e-mailings. Last e-mailing will go out next Tuesday.

e. Other: Information was sent to Warner Center News, Jewish Journal, KFWB News 980, etc

4. Cost/Budget: We are at the extreme high end of my projected parameters as the light and sound system is costing us as much as the comedians. Based on the new numbers (including more spent than anticipated on light, sound, paper goods etc), our break even is 102 people. As shown below we are now passed that point.

5. Raffle: We need raffle items because we only have a few items and we need to have a critical mass of items for people to be interested in even purchasing raffle tickets. Brian Adelstein told me that he got items donated by IHOP, Trader Joes, Ralphs and Stone Cold Creamery-however, none of the items or certificates have been received by us. I got a \$50 gift certificate from Reata Grill at the Promenade and Vic Merkow got us a \$50 gift certificate from Maggiano's. The Men's Club donated 3 Jewish books and a Fred Claire Book autographed by Steve Springer. Steve Wold donated a Snoopy Phone. Carol and I donated gift certificates to Topz and Casa Di Pizza, an animated cel, artwork, a golf round for two at the Greens in Valencia, and magic tricks with a magic lesson. My father donated 2 sports figurines and an autographed baseball (hopefully:)) We also have 4 suite tickets for the Clippers v. the Suns on January 8th. As we want each 'item' to be worth at least \$50 I will combine some of these donations thus we only have the equivalent of 12-14 items. The raffle will be targeted raffle where one puts their tickets into the raffle box for the particular item they are interested in. I propose raffle tickets being sold at \$2 each; 12 for \$20 and 30 for \$50. Any thoughts?

6. Alcohol/Wine/Bar Service: Steve and Nancy Wold have graciously offered to provide us with wine left over from their daughter's bas mitzvah. I have also ordered 2 cases from Bruce at the Green Jug and 2 cases of beer. We will have a bottle of red and a bottle of white zinfandel on each table and have wine available at the bar. We have at least one volunteer to act as a bartender. Others will be needed. I already purchased soda and mixers.

7. Food Service/Set up. We need bodies at STS starting at sundown to quickly put on table cloths, set up the individual place settings, centerpieces, move tables and chairs around, set up the bar, ice the wine and soda, place fortune cookies at tables, set up the raffle, assist in heating the food and then bringing it out.

8. Event: We will need people at a table at the door to check people in and provide their table assignment and sell raffle tickets and pass out raffle list and instructions.

9. Show Only: At the MC club meeting last week we discussed people coming for show only as we had a number of requests because of timing, dietary concerns etc. People can come for the show only-they should arrive at 8:15 as Comedy will begin at

8:30--for \$25.00 per person which includes the show, wine, soda, limited bar and dessert (fortune cookie :)

10. Numbers: As of this morning: we had 153 people paid and 12 additional reservations without payment. Spread the word and let's get 200+.

Stephen M. Levine

From: Levine, Stephen

Sent: Tuesday, November 23, 2004 5:23 PM

To: Levine, Stephen

Subject: Kung Pao Comedy Night

Gentlemen:

Fortune Cookies: Check this out-\$75.00 for 300 cookies in bulk (.25 each)-ignore the details on page re packaging in containers etc as we will get in the bulk; free shipping in two days and kosher-see fortunes at bottom of web page-they are very appropriate for this event. I think we order. What are your thoughts?

http://kosherman.com/fortune_cookies_giftpack_jewish.htm

Advertising: I will have a separate e-mail for Harvey at beginning of next week to send out to all e-mail recipients similar to the Tikun Olam one he sent today and then I will have a blurb prepared for the e-newsletter that I will also send to Jewish Journal and Warner Center News. I will also have the flyer ready next week and a separate flyer that we can have blown up for a poster. I want to make sure we have the poster, flyers etc all in temple by end of next week, in advance of Chanukah.

Banner: I also will call Aaron tomorrow re a banner for the outside.

Fact Sheet: I will also put together a quick fact sheet for the office if they get inquiries regarding details for this event.

David R.: Any progress re lights?

Reminder: Please get me raffle/auction items.

Shomrei Torah Synagogue Men's Club Proudly Presents

Kung Pao Comedy Night

Saturday December 25, 2004 at 7:00 PM

7353 Valley Circle Blvd, West Hills, CA



Mark Schiff

The Tonight Show
Late Night w/Letterman
HBO



Steve Mittleman

The Tonight Show
Late Night w/Letterman
Showtime



Jerry Diner

Seinfeld
Evening At the Improv
Caroline's Comedy Hour

The dinner/show package includes:

Chinese Buffet Dinner by Majestic Catering
Complimentary Wine and Soft Drinks
Limited Bar (or bring your own liquor)
Silent Auction and Raffles

\$40 per person (No Drink Minimum)

Reservations Required by Dec 17 - No Walkins

Adults (18 and over) only – guests encouraged

Buy tickets at the STS office.

For more information please contact:

Stephen Levine

slevine@wccplaw.com

(818) 609-2329

or call STS at (818) 346-0811

(Draft – Publicity invitation)

You and/or your spouse are cordially invited to Shomrei Torah Synagogue at 7353 Valley Circle Blvd. on Tuesday, October 19, October 26 and November 2, 2004 at 8:00 PM to participate in a program titled “Invitation to Judaism”. These discussions are offered free of charge as a way of introducing you to Judaism and what it has to offer us in the 21st Century. Refreshments will be served following each program.

In this program, you will learn about synagogue religious services and observances conducted in the home, life cycle events, and numerous other historical and current observances that have provided roots and identification to the Jewish people for more than 3000 years. Hear about personal experiences and observations from Jews by choice and Jews by chance.

Please reserve your place at this series of presentations by calling us at (818) 346-0811.