

Kirsten McKinney



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Entry details

Entry Name: 75th Anniversary: Robins School of Business

Institution Name: University of Richmond

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Introduction:

The Robins School of Business has deep roots in the food and beverage industry, making the menu for its 75th Anniversary celebration more than a meal—it was a tribute. Alumni connections include student-launched ventures such as Envee Dressing and Absurd Snacks, as well as celebrated regional brands like Ukrop's Homestyle Foods. These ties inspired a menu that honored the school's entrepreneurial spirit by weaving student innovation, local craftsmanship, and culinary artistry into every course. From the passed heavy hors d'oeuvres to the final dessert, guests tasted a living history of the business school's legacy in Virginia and beyond.

Essay:

Creativity and intentionality defined every element of the anniversary menu. Seven distinct passed hors d'oeuvres set an elegant, celebratory tone—including a Pesto Caesar Shrimp Caprese Skewer featuring Envee Dressing, developed by students through the Robins School's Bench Top Innovations program, and a Garlic Herb Crusted Lollipop Lamb Chop garnished with micro-mint harvested from the Babylon Micro Farm located within the business school itself. This living herb garden, steps from the event floor, connected the menu directly to the school's culture of innovation.

The buffet offered an extraordinary variety across dietary needs: a VIP Charcuterie Display featuring Firefly Goat Cheese, aged cheddar, and artisan meats; a Smoked Trout and Pork Platter with black garlic purée and blueberry

compote; and a Mediterranean spread with vegan hummus, tabbouleh, and cocktail pitas. Every course offered gluten-free, dairy-free, vegan, and nut-free alternatives, ensuring inclusivity without compromise to elegance.

Desserts carried the school's brand palette—dusky blue and rose chocolate-covered strawberries, gold-flaked French macarons, and mini trifle shooters in baklava, chocolate mousse, and tiramisu. Custom Ukrop's Sheet Cake Shooters honored one of Richmond's most beloved food legacies. The menu achieved a sophisticated balance of color, texture, flavor, and temperature across every station.

Introduction:

When outdoor tenting was cancelled one week before the event due to weather, the culinary team faced a defining challenge: reimagine the entire event footprint—without missing a beat. The team pivoted swiftly, transforming a series of linked hallways and common spaces within the Robins School into an elegant, cohesive celebration venue. Hot buffets became heavy, passed hors d'oeuvres. Hallways became service kitchens. A classroom and retail dining space were converted into production hubs. What could have been a setback became a showcase: the building itself became part of the story, with every corridor and common space elevated into something extraordinary.

Essay:

The theme honored the Robins School's 75-year legacy while embracing spring and progress. A palette of navy, blue, and white, reflecting the university's colors, appeared in every visual element. Uplighting created an ambient glow on brick walls and corridors. A live jazz group performed on the mezzanine, with music reaching the reception below. The University of Richmond's Spider mascot was projected in light on the mezzanine, while a Spider gobo welcomed guests at the entrance.

Neon geometric light sculptures anchored the entrance atrium, complemented by lush floral arrangements. The curved white bar, flanked by tall pedestals of white roses and blue hydrangeas, served as a dramatic focal point in the main corridor. Food stations were arranged to encourage natural guest flow through the space, each area distinct yet unified by the blue-and-white chinoiserie decor motif.

One of the most moving design choices placed a food station directly beneath the portrait of E. Claiborne Robins, the school's namesake, surrounded by florals and blue uplighting—connecting the celebration's culinary experience to the institution's founding legacy. Executed across three improvised kitchens in under a week, the result felt entirely deliberate and deeply memorable.

Introduction:

Every detail of the Robins School of Business's 75th Anniversary was designed to create moments of surprise and delight. The school's mascot—the Spider—was woven into the celebration in unexpected and skillful ways: sculpted into the golden pastry crust of a Baked Brie en Croute, projected in light on the lobby wall above a live jazz band, and cast onto the entrance floor as a gobo alongside the University of Richmond seal. These layered expressions of school pride—from edible art to architectural lighting—transformed familiar spaces into an immersive celebration that felt unmistakably, joyfully Richmond.

Essay:

The presentation strategy centered on visual storytelling at every level. Navy linens draped long buffet tables, which featured tiered risers and tall floral arrangements of blue hydrangeas, white dahlias, pink ranunculus, and greenery. Blue-and-white chinoiserie ginger jar vases appeared throughout, creating a unified décor motif that honored both the season and the school's sophisticated heritage.

The Baked Brie en Croute, featuring a hand-sculpted Spider crest in golden pastry and surrounded by fresh berries, was the buffet's visual centerpiece and one of the evening's most photographed moments. It showcased both culinary skill and institutional pride.

Deep blue uplighting transformed the school's brick-and-glass architecture into an atmospheric event space. A live jazz duo on the mezzanine added elegant energy throughout the venue. Service style was refined yet approachable,

suiting the diverse mix of students, faculty, retirees, and alumni. Every area, from the curved white bar to the station beneath the Robins portrait, was intentionally styled to deliver a consistent “wow” from arrival to farewell.

Introduction:

The Robins School of Business 75th Anniversary Celebration succeeded on every level: it honored the institution, delighted a diverse audience, and showcased the catering team's remarkable capabilities under pressure. Sustainability was integrated at every stage as a reflection of the team's values. Local sourcing connected the event to the regional community. The enthusiastic guest response, from students and retirees to long-tenured faculty and alumni, reflected an event that exceeded expectations in craft, creativity, and care.

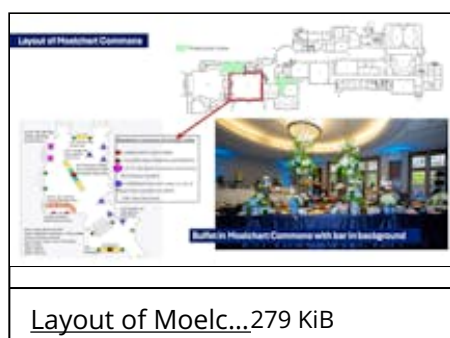
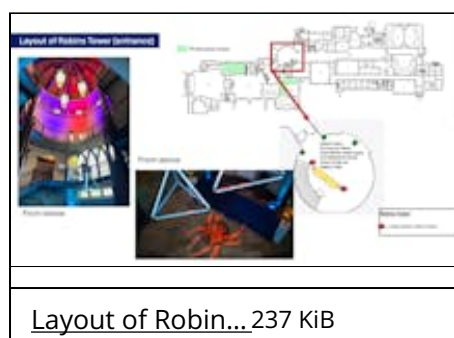
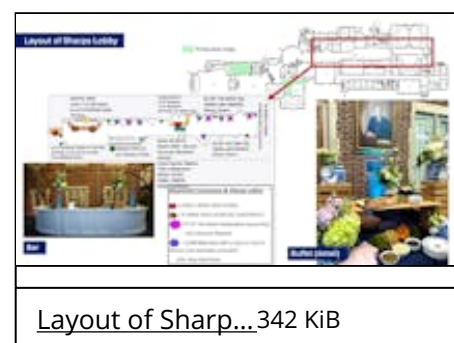
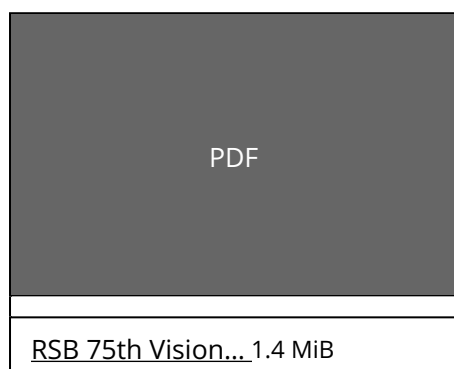
Essay:

Sustainability and regional partnership were central to the event. Micro-herbs for hors d'oeuvres were harvested from the Babylon Farms case within the Robins School, reducing food miles to a minimum. Firefly Goat Cheese from Maryland highlighted regional dairy, while the beverage program featured Virginia-made selections: Hardywood Brewery and Devil's Backbone craft beers, and Prince Michel Cabernet Sauvignon, a celebrated Commonwealth wine.

The event also honored the school's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Two student-created products from the Bench Top Innovations program, Envee Dressing and Absurd Snacks, appeared on the hors d'oeuvres menu. Custom Ukrop's cakes paid tribute to a Richmond food institution closely tied to the university's history. A station beneath the portrait of E. Claiborne Robins provided a living connection between the celebration and the benefactor whose vision made the school possible.

Most impressively, the team delivered this multi-station, fully branded, and logistically complex event after a complete venue change just one week prior, with no compromise to quality or guest experience. Enthusiastic feedback from guests of all ages was the clearest measure of success. The “wow” factor came not from extravagance, but from excellence in craft, creativity, local pride, and the team's quiet confidence.

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ProductionHub-...299 KiB



Chefs Touch.jpg 380 KiB



Buffet Sharps.jp...528 KiB



Buffet Moelche... 519 KiB



Sharps Lobby fr...375 KiB



Mezzanine.jpg 269 KiB



RoastedVeg-Tro... 360 KiB



HorsDOeuvres.j...290 KiB



Ukrops-Display.... 407 KiB



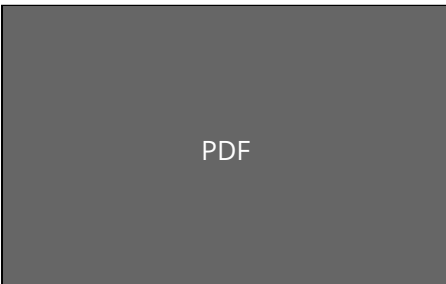
UR-Strawberrie... 245 KiB



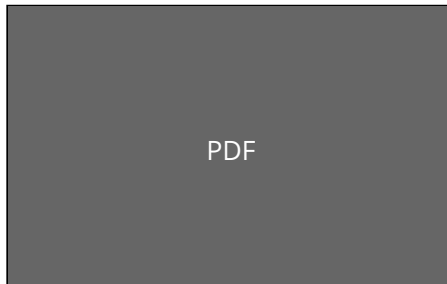
Dessert Buffet.j... 308 KiB



Cake Shooters.j... 297 KiB



RSB75 Producti... 148 KiB



HACCP Temp Lo... 160 KiB