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Texas Christian University

Entry details

Entry Name:	TCU Catering Event of the Year: An Afternoon in Bloom
Institution Name:	Texas Christian University
Entry Completed By (<i>name and position</i>):	Katelyn McPherson, Marketing Director

Each year, Sodexo at Texas Christian University (TCU Dining) hosts a faculty and staff appreciation event. For this year’s celebration, the university entrusted TCU Dining with full creative direction, with the added responsibility of honoring the chancellor’s 20-year tenure as he concludes his service at the end of the semester. Anticipating approximately 1,800 attendees, TCU Dining brought this vision to life with a Garden Party on May 1, 2025.

Essay:

The menu for the Garden Party was designed with growth, prosperity, and changing seasons in mind, while honoring Chancellor Boschini’s legacy. Inspired by his Italian heritage, many of the 11 stations incorporated elements that were personal and celebratory.

Guests were offered both savory and sweet items, including traditional tea service featuring tiered trays of delicate tea sandwiches in floral cuts and various shapes. In place of traditional charcuterie, charcuterie cones were offered inside of waffle cones, allowing guests to connect with one another freely while enjoying the charcuterie bites.

A selection of hot teas, complete with honey and sugars, allowed for customization, while iced teas in flavors like peach, mango, and raspberry paired perfectly to the garden setting. A highlight of the event was the Italian gelato station and soda bar, where guests could craft their own drinks with options like lemonada and blood orange, garnished with fresh orange slices.

As reflected in the campus dining program, TCU Dining was cognizant of dietary restrictions throughout the event by offering gluten-free, vegan, vegetarian, and allergy-free items as well. The culinary team being on-site allowed for continuous time management for each station, effectively following any necessary protocols for food safety.

Introduction:

The development of the Garden Party began in February 2025, when the team was given broad creative freedom to concept the event's vision. Through brainstorming processes, the team explored themes that would both celebrate the close of the semester and honor the Chancellor's legacy. The concept of a Garden Party emerged as the ideal direction to symbolize growth and the idea of blooming where you're planted. From the start, the team was very intentional about balancing any floral aesthetics with more masculine elements, ensuring the theme was inclusive and reflective of the Chancellor's lasting impact.

Essay:

The TCU Dining team executed the Garden Party theme with beautifully crafted designs at every turn. The theme guided each decision, from the food presentations to the décor. Greenery walls, hanging vines and birdcages, paper flowers, and butterfly accents transformed the space into a living garden, while mirrors and positive affirmation stations encouraged reflection and connection.

To balance the feminine often associated with garden themes, the team worked to identify masculine pieces as well. Interactive stations, such as build-your-own seed packets and spice blends, provided hands-on experiences that tied directly to the theme of growth while also being inclusive. Lawn games like oversized chess and cornhole further added a fun and interactive element for all to enjoy.

The day of the event was one full of engagement and personalization. Guests could write letters to the Chancellor and create take-home items like the spice mixes and seed packets, as well as build-your-own bouquet. Live entertainment was woven throughout, and the culinary displays brought the theme to life in a way that felt intentional and memorable.

Introduction:

Drawing inspiration from nature's growth and ever-changing seasons, the Garden Party transformed the university's stadium club space into a living garden filled with greenery, movement, and interactive elements. From artistic performances to beautiful food displays, every detail encouraged guests to connect and celebrate. Sustainability and personalization were top priorities with take-home elements and environmentally conscious design choices. The end result was more than a traditional faculty appreciation event: it was an unforgettable celebration of community and the Chancellor's lasting impact.

Essay:

Guests were greeted by a Greek goddess live statue, setting a tone of timeless elegance, while a butterfly-costumed aerialist poured drinks, adding movement and wonder above. Culinary presentations doubled as art, with a rolling cannoli cart and passed appetizers displayed on wheat grass, alongside organic-inspired dishes featuring goat cheese balls, mushrooms, greenery, and edible flowers.

Sustainability played a role in the experience, as well. Edible cupcakes, styled as floral centerpieces, offered a beautiful yet consumable alternative to traditional décor. Guests could also create their own takeaways, including build-your-own bouquets, seed packs, and spice mixes. Additionally, a station was provided for faculty and staff to write handwritten letters to the Chancellor, adding a personal touch to round out the event.

Visually, the event provided flowers, hanging bird cages, greenery walls, mirrors, and butterflies filled the space, complemented by positive affirmation statements that encouraged reflection and connection. Live music also played through the duration of the event.

Together, the team executed a celebration that was as thoughtful as it was visually unforgettable.

Introduction:

The success of the Garden Party was echoed in positive feedback received from attendees and university leadership alike. Chancellor Boschini himself was deeply moved by the celebration, affirming the event's purpose to pay homage to his legacy. While TCU Dining was initially given a flexible, ballpark budget, the university's priority was clear: to create a memorable celebration for its dedicated faculty and staff while honoring the Chancellor's impact. This support allowed for strategic collaboration with local vendors and businesses, enhancing necessary outsourcing such as specialty rentals and the custom cupcake centerpieces.

Essay:

At the event's conclusion, TCU Dining was deeply touched to receive high praise from university leadership and attendees. The positive response not only validated the team's vision but also resulted in full confidence from the university to concept and execute future events turnkey. As an annual tradition, this celebration continues to evolve, with each year's theme intentionally being kept a surprise to help build anticipation and excitement across the campus's faculty and staff.

Additionally, TCU Dining included a thoughtful approach to sustainability. Wherever possible, the team opted for reusable glassware and china, particularly for the traditional tea service, reinforcing the event's refined aesthetic while minimizing waste. At the same time, some disposable items were incorporated strategically to support ease of service, mobility, and guest convenience, specifically for interactive stations and takeaways. This balance allowed guests to move freely throughout the space without constraint, while still maintaining an overall commitment to sustainability.

Partnerships with local vendors further strengthened the event's execution, ensuring high-quality, customized pieces while supporting the surrounding community. Together, these considerations contributed to an unforgettable event.

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