

Catering Works focuses on serving green

THE FOOD INDUSTRY IS ONE that creates a lot of waste, and as co-owners of local catering and special event planning company Catering Works, sisters Jill Kucera and Lorin Laxton are finding ways to address this harsh reality.

"We are both parents and want our children to have access to the same resources that we have now," says Lorin. "Taking the appropriate steps to conserve resources is worth it for us, and it's important that we act as good stewards of the environment."

Catering Works has enjoyed one of its most successful years to date, and is approaching 20 years serving the Triangle.

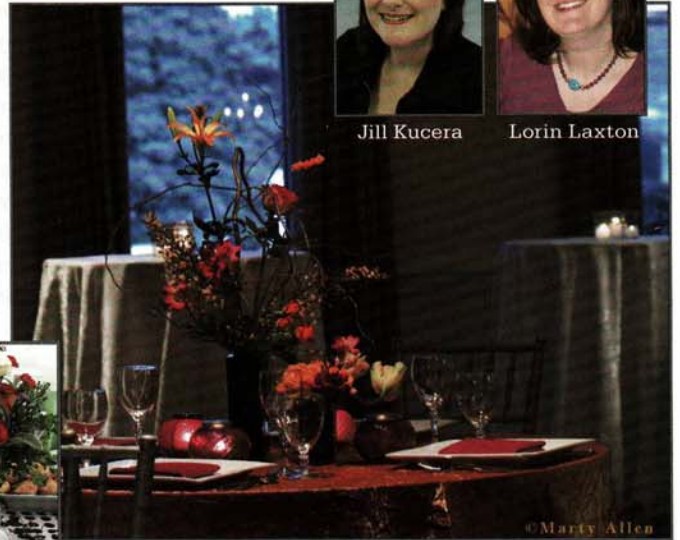
"We attribute our success to Lorin and I being really focused and hands-on with the business, and passing that attitude on to employees," Kucera adds. "What we feel sets us apart in this industry, is a genuine concern for our employees and clients, and a passion for entertaining and a commitment to quality."

Reducing catering waste

With this success means serving around 800 to 1,200 lunches a day, and catering an average of 50 special events a month.

The execution and delivery of all this food and special event essentials results in significant waste, of course, so Catering Works continues to seek new ways to eliminate waste and maintains a comprehensive recycling program. The company has just switched to 100 percent compostable cups made from corn polymers, provided by NatureWorks LLC. "It is great that we have this alternative and other alternatives available from their line of products, but more options are needed," says Laxton.

NatureWorks manufactures corn-based polymers that compete with the cost and performance of petroleum-based packaging materials. "We are bringing these products on board not only as a substitute for non-recyclables, but also because it is



Jill Kucera



Lorin Laxton

About Catering Works

Location of company: Raleigh

Number of employees: 45 daily, up to 100 seasonal

Services/clients: Catering and special event planning serving Raleigh and the Triangle community

Web site: www.cateringworks.com

important for us to rely less on the petroleum industry," Kucera explains.

Fuel and food costs

Being green-minded in today's economy often means paying a premium price for compostables and environmentally friendly materials. Kucera and Laxton face this trend in addition to consumer food prices increasing roughly 5-7 percent in recent years, with some commodities rising 20 percent or more, Kucera says.

"These are some challenging times, but our goal remains to provide the best quality food, service and presentation," Laxton adds.

Making 45 deliveries a day for lunch could put a strain on any budget, and Kucera says that fuel costs for the company run just under \$4,000 a month. Catering Works strives to plan and coordinate its deliveries in order to make the fewest number of trips possible. One driver may take lunch to 3-4 offices in one trip,

so economizing on deliveries with a minimum number of trips cuts down on fuel consumption and cost.

Kucera and Laxton also stress the importance of buying from local food sources, but say that it is difficult at times to order and even afford locally grown produce and other foods with competitive pricing overseas.

"We try to make noise about it and keep pressing the issue, so that the demand will rise and the price of these items will go down," Kucera explains.

In addition to an environmentally-guided spirit, the two sisters are actively involved in the communities they "serve." The company recycles food by distributing leftovers to the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle, which picks up meals each week, directly delivering them to local communities. Catering Works also partners with local organizations such as the Tammy Lynn Center for Developmental Disabilities and Susan G. Komen for the Cure. 