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# EDUCATION

## Planning on a career in special event and meeting management

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**WAYNE** — What do Martin Short, Jennifer Lopez and Preston Bailey all have in common? The latter is a well-known event designer and wedding planner to celebrity A-listers such as Donald Trump and Oprah Winfrey, while the former two have played wedding planners on the big screen in both *Father of the Bride* movies, and *The Wedding Planner*, respectively.

With media attention and prime-time shows showcasing event and meeting managers, the special events industry has increased in awareness over the past few years. As a result, there is a growing demand for well-trained individuals who understand the complexities of the industry.

To that end, William Paterson University's Center for Continuing Education and Distance Learning is offering a seven-week course to help train individuals interested in the industry. The workshop-style course, *Special Event and Meeting Management*, focuses on developing introductory and intermediate event and meeting management skills, including the opportunity to

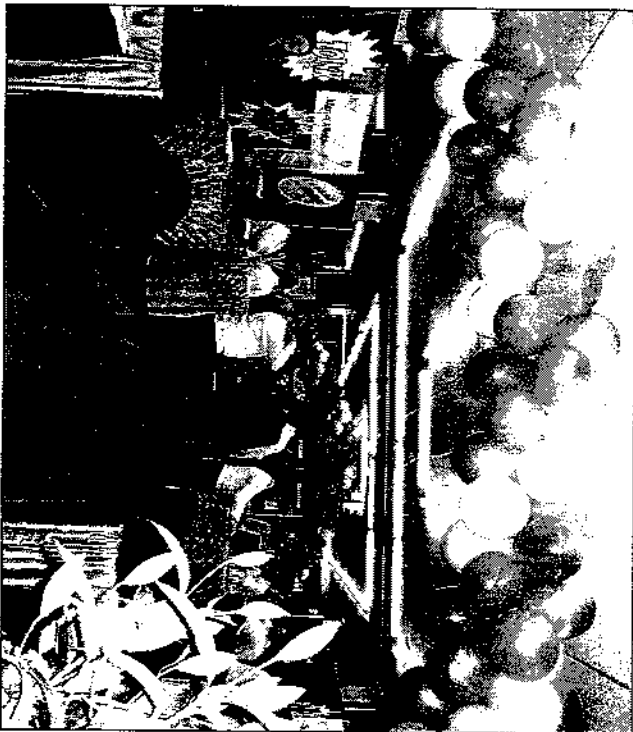


PHOTO COURTESY OF LORRAINE MARIELLA

William Paterson University's Center for Continuing Education and Distance Learning is offering a seven-week course to help train individuals interested in becoming event and meeting planners.

experience an actual meeting or event.

Lorraine Mariella, certified professional planner and owner of Celebrations Event & Meeting Management in Wayne, created the course and will be its instructor.

people interested in getting into the field after having had fun planning events for friends or family.

"I get calls all of the time from people inquiring if I am hiring anyone to work at my company," she said. "They usually go on to tell me how much fun they had planning their friend's shower or their parents' fortieth birthday party. Then I ask the question, 'Do you have any professional experience or schooling in the field?' The answer is usually no."

She is quick to add in order to be a good meeting and event planner, one must have the proper training and education.

"I always find it interesting that people think they can just plan an event or break into the field because it 'looks fun,'" she said. "You wouldn't call up a restaurant and ask for the job of chef just because you like to cook dinner for your family, would you?"

Mariella herself has been awarded the Certified Special Event Professional (CSEP) designation by the International Special Events Society Certification Committee. She has also earned the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) designation through the

Convention Industry Council. She is one of less than 100 event professionals worldwide who have earned both of these designations.

Recognizing that there were limited opportunities for an education in event and meeting management in the area, Mariella said she created the course to help individuals obtain the basic to intermediate skills needed in the industry.

Becoming an event planner is a two-step process.

"My advice to people interested in the field is always two things: One, get some professional experience and, two, get educated in the field," she said.

Professional experience, Mariella said, may come from an internship at an event management or meeting management company. Another way to gain experience is to volunteer for a charity event, which would allow individuals to work side-by-side with a professional and gain some valuable insight into the field.

"Event and meeting management requires working early mornings and late nights, sometimes for several days in a row," she said. "Beside the ability to

work while sleep-deprived, you must be creative, organized and like to work with people.

"By getting some hands-on experience, you not only learn what it takes to produce a successful event, but you get to make an educated decision if you really are cut out for this line of work," she said.

And if you do decide it's for you, the next step is education. "To really set your self apart from others in this competitive field, a good education is key," she said. "Learning about industry standards, terminology and resources can best be gained by attending courses and seminars on the subject."

The WPU course demonstrated professional practices used to create successful meetings and events. Students will have an improved understanding of the special events industry and will develop knowledge of the tasks required to produce a successful special event.

The course will meet three hours per week every Wednesdays, June 21 to August from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. For more information about the course, visit [www.wpu.edu/ced](http://www.wpu.edu/ced)