

Funny business

NOTHING CAN PRODUCE A YAWN FROM EMPLOYEES more quickly or reliably than the mention of a "team building exercise" or a "company awards presentation." That's where Rave Reviews or A.C.E. Entertainment can come to the rescue.

Both are Denver firms seemingly guided by the principle that anything worth meeting about is also worth laughing about.

Rave bills itself as "the cure for the common meeting," and A.C.E. as "a festival for the senses."

Companies like Sun Microsystems, Charles Schwab, AT&T, Hershey Foods and dozens of others have hired the firms to put an entertaining spin on everything from new product launches to new customer-support programs.

Take the team-building exercise Rave Reviews put on for 450 Xcel Energy employees. Employees donned chef hats, were

divided into teams and set about to make ravioli — the largest quantity and the most creative a team could conjure. Then, while the ravioli cooked, the Rave Reviews cast taught a tap dance, and everybody sat down to eat.

"It gets people talking to each other," Sharon Allison says of Rave Reviews' team-building technique. "But it's real, honest, non-stressful talking, so they begin a relationship in a place

BY MIKE TAYLOR



A cheerleader act from A.C.E. Entertainment. From left: Linda Klein, Matthew Taylor, and Barbara Gehring

that's not difficult or stressful. It's like kids making friends in the sandbox."

A.C.E. Entertainment is a comedy troupe that performs what Linda Klein calls "spontaneous theater" internationally and throughout Colorado. She, Barbara Gehring and Matthew Taylor formed the company three years ago and still perform their improvisational comedy at least once a month in Denver and Boulder. A.C.E. is an acronym of their nationalities — American, Canadian and English.

Their work at corporate functions, such as Microsoft's launch of its XP software in Denver and Salt Lake City, is a natural extension of their stage work. When Boulder-based software firm SignalSoft sponsored a conference for about 100 customers and partners, the company hired A.C.E. to make sure the event maintained a healthy mix of work and fun — especially during a long bus

ride from the hotel conference site in south Denver to a cocktail party downtown. "They did this whole shtick

where they pretended we were on an airplane and they were flight attendants, asking if we wanted chicken or beef, that sort of thing," says Eric McCabe, SignalSoft's vice president of marketing. "It was perfect because it was the end of the day, and we didn't want to hit people with a bunch more serious stuff. And they tied everything into our products."

Despite the recession, neither Rave Reviews nor A.C.E. reports a slowdown in business.

"It's a unique way to get a message across," says Allison, who founded Rave Reviews 12 years ago. "Right now, everything seems so uncertain, and people need to feel good about themselves and their companies and their possibilities in life.

"We can help deliver that message. Our shows do that." ■

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