



Harith Productions Brings Ancient Mexico to Life Through Food, Art and Education

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Client: Endo Pharmaceuticals

Program: Mexico

Endo Pharmaceuticals looked to Harith Productions to create and design an exceptional, one-of-a-kind catered event for its 2006 President's Club winners in Los Cabos, Mexico. The event was to be a destination-based culinary affair that would unfold the history of the ancient Aztec and Mayan civilizations. The planning team's objective was to mesmerize and enthrall each guest from the moment they entered the ballroom — and to appeal to all five senses. Endo Pharmaceuticals also wanted Harith to create an event that would be socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

Blending the theme of the event with the exceptional service of the Westin Resort & Spa, Los Cabos, "Myths and Legends of the Aztec and Maya" was designed to create an epicurean masterpiece that featured world-class culinary service while unfolding the story of the dynamic Mesoamerican people who settled in the Mexican lands centuries ago. Carrying this through the menu would provide Endo's President's Club winners with an epicurean journey of edible art featuring the unique natural resources and flavors indigenous to Mexico.

From concept to fruition, no expense or effort was spared to accomplish Harith's goal of total customer satisfaction. The first challenge was establishing a menu that would appeal to a large group and stay fresh in a food line without compromising taste, temperature or visual presentation. Thus, the menu designer mixed items of distinct textures, aromas, tastes and temperatures. To complement the various courses, plates of different sizes were used to present each course of the meal, including a specially made Aztec calendar that served as a charger plate.

Another challenge was to ensure the service of the five-course dinner was efficient and elegant. The evening was tightly scripted to allow for entertainment, speeches and award presentations, and the banquet professionals — who contributed as an additional entertainment element — provided synchronized service at each table throughout the evening.



Creating a destination-based, culinary event that would tell the history of the ancient Aztec and Mayan civilizations was a multi-step process. First, planners researched native foods used hundreds of years ago by the Aztec and Maya people. They studied the agriculture, cultural and religious lifestyle of these people to learn more about their traditional foods. Most of the guests had little knowledge of ancient Mexican civilizations, which helped create a true learning experience through an exotic menu.

The next step was to create a menu that would incorporate the foods they had researched. The meeting planner worked closely with the hotel's culinary team to create a five-course meal that would be pleasing to a large crowd, yet still feature several distinct and unusual elements. Each of the five courses included at least one indigenous ingredient.

Salad was tossed in delicate xoxonostle, a prickly pear cactus vinaigrette. The main ingredient in the soup was pumpkin, which was not only an important staple food to Mesoamerican people, but also a crop of great importance to their economy. Next, cleansing Jamaica flower sorbet was presented atop an ice sculpture replica of a Mayan step pyramid. It was accentuated by the Mayan liqueur Xtabentun, made with honey extracted by bees from Xtabentun flowers, which grow only in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. The main course was fillet flavored with pulque sauce, a type of agave extracted from maguey cactus that in ancient times was an important part of people's diets in the Mexican highlands and now is a traditional alcoholic beverage of Mesoamerica.

To create and design a catered event that would immediately mesmerize and enthrall guests,

the ballroom was filled with authentic Aztec centerpieces, lush native fauna and clear tables showcasing genuine artifacts. The printed menu, a three dimensional die-cut of the Chichen Itza step pyramid with a story-telling description of the courses, was placed at each setting. As servers presented each plate, the story of ancient Mexico unfolded.

To ensure the event was socially, economically and environmentally sustainable, and to support local economy, the team purchased room décor, plates and statues used for the gala awards dinner in Guadalajara, Mexico, as well as the villages of Tonalá, Tlaquepaque and Chapala. Organizers also purchased locally made pewter, agave honey and mango marmalade to support a local women's project.

Many of the fruits, meats and vegetables used for the meal were locally grown. And the evening's entertainment — a "ballet folklórico," or authentic Mexican dance troupe — showcased the positive efforts of several local communities that united and are committed to sharing their knowledge of ancient Mexican culture through their colorful and vibrant dances.

In the end, Endo Pharmaceuticals' goals of increasing sales, improving employee morale and enhancing perception of Endo's commitment to recognizing its top sales representatives were accomplished. From 2005 to 2006, sales have grown from \$820.2 million to \$909.7 million. Endo also was able to leverage the extraordinary awards dinner as a recruiting tool. At the beginning of 2006, Endo's sales force comprised approximately 360 representatives. By the end of 2006, it increased to about 610. ●