

The party professional

Wine chilled? Check. Flowers fresh? Check. Bow tie straight? Double check. Dalan Sharpe is the social set's go-to guy when it comes to taking care of details small and large.

After a night spent helping his dad rinse hundreds of dirty dishes at a Westover Hills house party, 11-year-old Dalan Sharpe swore he'd never follow in his father's footsteps. He'd watched his dad, James, a wait-staff manager, work long hours at the Carriage House restaurant in Fort Worth while moonlighting at private functions on his nights off and knew that he didn't want that kind of life for himself.

By Tiffany Figueiredo

James Sharpe didn't want that kind of life for his son, either, which is why he had Dalan perform the messiest, most backbreaking jobs possible when he helped out at parties. It's also why he made sure his son performed well at O.D. Wyatt, a predominantly black public high school in southeast Fort Worth, and at Grambling State, where Dalan earned a master's degree.

"My dad came up the rough way," says Dalan. "He wanted something better for me than what he did. It was hard work. I had to wear a white jacket, and I'd have food all over me by the end of the night. I thought I hated it, and didn't do it very often, but I was a snappy dresser, even in high school, so when I felt the need to buy something new, my dad would let me bus tables and earn enough to pay for my Polos or my Bally loafers."

Still, in 2000, after several years of teaching in Fort Worth public schools such as Morningside and O.D. Wyatt and helping his dad occasionally, Dalan felt called back to a service career in a big way. These days, at age 37, he is in charge of his own small army of waiters, bartenders and



Photos by Ralph Lauer

busboys, and no important Fort Worth soiree is complete without Dalan in his signature custom bowties (ever the dapper dresser, he has them made in designer fabrics by an online company) smoothly overseeing everything.

And he's not cutting the young kids who work for him any slack, either. "You do not go into this business lightly," he says. "I want them to get an education first. I work them as hard as I can, so that they can decide if they have the right character to do this long-term."

Not that Dalan is afraid to get his own hands dirty. Despite his childhood vow to avoid washing dishes, he still finds himself alongside his staff, rinsing flatware, mixing cocktails, arranging place settings, passing hors d'oeuvres, serving dinner courses, even cooking on occasion. "We do it all, everything that needs to be done at a party," he says. "Just last night, we had a party in Southlake that was supposed to be for 150 people. It was more like 300. I can't even begin to guess how many dishes I washed."

Dalan says that when he told his father of his plans to start his own company, his father questioned not only his ability to withstand the pressures of the business but also his ability to get "gigs." His father's fears turned out to be unfounded, as Dalan and his crew, which includes his mother, brother and father (who Dalan says still makes the best beef tenderloin in Fort Worth), work 100 or so events during party season, which runs September through December. He also is there whenever one of his clients experiences something monumental, be it triumph or tragedy.

"Whenever people gather in Westover, I'm probably there," he says. "Sometimes it's when someone passes. Sometimes it's when someone gets married. I'm there to make sure that everything goes seamlessly for the family."

More often than not, the "family" he speaks of is that of Lee and Ramona Bass, whom Dalan met at age 16 while helping his father at Zoo



Ball. Dalan oversees the Bass table at the annual event, as well as family birthday celebrations, weddings and extravagant out-of-town parties, whatever the occasion. He's even been mistaken for famed event planner Preston Bailey, with whom he's worked several times.

"Preston worked on a Bass wedding reception at Shady Oaks," he says. "Here we are, close to the reception time, and he's hand-sewing all these flowers onto a screen. Everyone was running around like crazy people and he's calmly saying, 'I'll have it done.' You have to admire that. Once at a big party in San Francisco, after he left, people saw me overseeing the wait staff and assumed I was him. Of course, I just smiled."

Like Bailey, Dalan's calm demeanor and charm make him one of the go-to guys when it comes to party planning, both locally and nationally. He's

worked for local restaurateur Grady Spears and frequently filled in at Jon Bonnell's place when he was needed. He also is manager of food and beverage operations at Ashton Depot in Fort Worth and in January was asked to oversee the wait staff at President Barack Obama's inaugural luncheon. Dalan downplays his role in the much-publicized event but admits that he did everything he could to get on television, to no avail.

"I had worked a fundraiser for Hillary Clinton at Joe T. Garcia's," he says. "My dad had always worked at the Bush and Clinton events whenever they were in Texas. [Hillary Clinton] asked for my card, and months later, here I am heading to Washington for this lunch. We weren't supposed to take our cellphones in, but of course I did and was calling my mom from the restroom, telling her to watch; but I never got on TV," he says. "I couldn't bring my own staff, and working with people you don't know is hectic. Then [Sen. Edward] Kennedy collapsed. ... It was crazy."

As for the rest of the inauguration, Dalan says that he felt a cold coming on and "took some NyQuil and went to bed early. I didn't even go to any balls. That's how it goes. Big events are exhausting to pull off."

So will Dalan, who has two little girls and hopes to have three more children with his makeup-artist wife, Tamara, take after his dad and put the kids through the paces of the family business while they're young?

"If they want to go into this business, they need to see it up close and have the heart for it," he says. "I think I've always had the heart for it. It's what I was meant to do, and everything is just how I imagined. In fact, it's even better."

DETAILS, DETAILS

Dalan J. Sharpe Services can provide a single server for a small dinner, a handful of bartenders for a cocktail party or dozens of staff for an elaborate fete. To reach Dalan, call him directly at 817-996-6669, although speaking from experience, texting this busy man at that number ensures an instant response.

Dalan Sharpe sets the table at a private-home event as chef Jon Bonnell works in the kitchen. The two partner frequently as Bonnell's dinners are popular charity auction items.

