

# Cheap ways to make a bumpin' open house

By Jessika Jordan-Stephens

## Location

Instead of renting chairs and tables for your backyard, host your open house at a public park or church venue. Although you might have to pay rent, these places have chairs, tables, grills and kitchens to use.

Another way to cut down on all costs is to have a joint open house at the venue. By sharing the party with your closest friends, you can split the cost of rent and food. This also makes it more convenient for your guests because they will only have to go to one place if they know several of the graduates, which gives you a better chance of seeing them.

Ann Caskey, a PM instructional aide, and her husband joined with seven other families to host one large open house for their children at German Park several years ago.

She pointed out another cost to consider at a venue away from home. If your parents are planning to serve alcohol to the 21+ over guests, it will likely require purchase of a one-day liability insurance policy. If alcohol will be part of the open house, be sure to check that the reception hall, hospitality room or house of worship doesn't prohibit it.

## Invitations

Make a collage of party information and photographs on the invitations and send them electronically.

If you want to send personalized print invites, Shutterfly.com offers 50 free prints when you first register on its site. But note: This deal isn't advertised on the front page.

Another option: Use invite-shop.com. The least expensive design costs 89 cents a card.

## Decorations

Cherie Lowe, a southside-based budget entrepreneur, writes a blog for families with money-saving tips at [www.queenoffree.net](http://www.queenoffree.net). The mother of two suggests buying solid colored plates and napkins instead of buying the supplies marked with "Graduate."

Then, consider thinking simply. "Make one decoration be in the spotlight. Making all aspects of the open house over-the-top is expensive and looks busy," she said.

A free way to say "high school memories" is to hang your sports

and activity t-shirts on hangers and display them in the party area or on a coat rack along with hats and a letter jacket, Caskey says. She also says spray painting Mason jars or empty wine bottles blue and silver and using them as candle holders are inexpensive options.

Finally, instead of printing out multiple photos to display, design a slideshow on Microsoft or Google. Using an HDMI cord, arrange to play the slideshow on the TV for visitors to stop and watch.

## Food

Make your own. The most efficient and cheapest way to supply food is to make it in bulk. Try baked pasta, macaroni and cheese or pasta salad. For meats, try Sam's Club, Costco or GFS, where one can buy meats and other groceries in bulk for less money than a normal grocery.

He says it is much cheaper to buy and cut up your own vegetables vs. buying a vegetable tray. The same plan works for meat and cheese platters as well.

Jackie Renfrow, event coordinator for Perry Township schools, says that for catering on a budget, she recommends GFS, a by-the-bulk grocery store off U.S. 31 by



Senior Hlawn Thluai designs her own cupcake by swirling blue and white icing together (Photo by Erica Irish).

the Greenwood Park Mall. She recommends the pre-cooked pork for pulled-pork sandwiches, nacho cheese and chips, and coleslaw. This is what she served at her own granddaughter's graduation party last year. Renfrow, whose children attended PM, used to work in the cafeteria here. She's been with the township since 1993.

A time and money saver is to set up a make-your-own bar featuring hot dogs, fruit, popcorn and cupcakes, says Caskey. Guests can garnish their own dogs anyway they like them. For popcorn fixings, copy what the gourmet popcorn places offer. Parmesan cheese, ranch seasoning, seasoned salt or mini-M&Ms are popular. For the fruit, provide bamboo sticks and bowls of sliced bananas, whole strawberries, and any other fruit easily skewered on a shish kabob stick. And for the cupcakes, set out blue and white icings, sprinkles, M&M's, along with whipped cream and blueberries for guests to decorate as they like.

If you want to offer ready-made desserts, recruit a family member or close friend who is a talented baker. Homemade cookies or brownies aren't that hard to make and cost less than the bakery. As for a traditional, personalized cake, go to a supermarket or big box store. Their prices are usually lower than bakery prices.



Senior Tuan Rem loads up her individual cupcake with whipped cream and blue, chocolate dots (Photo by Erica Irish).



Buying plain cupcakes and letting friends design them makes for a cheaper dessert option (Photo by Erica Irish).

# Tan,



**You have come so far, overcome many obstacles and succeeded at every opportunity. It has been a joy watching you. Now on to Ball State. May your life hold many adventures and your imagination never fade.**

*With love,  
From your entire family*



Tanis Henry

# Ashleigh,

**Congratulations! We are so proud of you! Can't wait to see what the future holds for you.**

**Love, Mom and Harper**



Ashleigh Prifogle