

## **LESSONS LEARNED FROM SHELLEY A. MARSHALL FOUNDATION TEA PARTIES**

### **MAKING CONTACT:**

The *Tea Across America* web page will, hopefully, put people in touch with each other so there will be a core group of volunteers in your area. The Shelley A. Marshall Foundation typically serves tea to groups of 60-80 people, and we like to have approximately 12 people on hand to help with the set up, service (6 serving tea, and 6 serving food), and clean-up. If you have trouble coming up with enough volunteers, you may want to consider seeking volunteers from local civic groups, like the Kiwanas or Jr. League.

As your group of volunteers grows, you may be ready to contact a nursing home (we usually talk to the nursing home's activities director) to see if they are interested in a tea party. It's important to explain to them exactly what you're planning in a fairly detailed fashion. In our case, we explain that we will bring in the tea, the urns to brew it, and the people to pour it; that we will bring everything that will go on each table (i.e., the teacups, creamers and sugar, plates (nice grade paper), silverware, and, table decorations); that we will bring in food and we will serve it. We discuss linens with the nursing home – we have quite a few linens, but depending on how many we're seating, sometimes the nursing home becomes responsible for the linens. By having such a detailed discussion, we allay many of the nursing homes fears while, at the same time, sharpening and focusing our own plans.

The nursing homes should be responsible for developing a guest list and giving you an expected head count. If you need assistance with setting up, feel free to ask the nursing home – we've never had one say no.

Another feature of a Shelley A. Marshall Foundation tea party is the participation of high school students. The job of the students is, simply, to take tea and converse with the seniors (the seniors really enjoy having someone new to talk to, especially a young person). While this is a nice touch, it is not absolutely necessary for a *Tea Across America* tea party, especially since the timing of the tea party will make it difficult to make contact with high school students. If you would like to pursue this option, however, we suggest you contact teachers at your local high school who are involved with the National Honor Society or the Key Club – these organizations are pretty reliable and often maintain contact with their members via e-mail, thereby making it possible to coordinate a tea party with them even during the summer months.

### **TEA:**

We purchase the tea for our tea parties from local tea shops. We are able to purchase the tea because, as a charity, people have donated funds for that purpose; we are still a young charity, however, and will not be able to purchase tea for the potentially hundreds of tea parties that may occur during *Tea Across America*. We suggest you visit

your local tea shop and explain the concept of *Tea Across America* to them – it's very likely they will give you a discount, if they don't donate the tea outright.

At Foundation tea parties we serve three different types of loose leaf tea. We always serve a Pai Mu Tan white tea, which was Shelley's favorite, but we try to rotate the other two teas so we're always introducing the seniors to something new and exotic (lately, one of these two teas has been a decaf tea – seniors like that option). So many of the seniors have grown up with the relatively bland teas that can be purchased at the supermarket, and are quite pleasantly surprised with the teas we have served them. Some of the teas that have been big hits include: Rose Petal Congou, Jasmine, French Plum, Ginger Peach, and Black Currant. Serve something fun, and you can't go wrong.

We typically use three 60-cup coffee urns to brew enough tea for approximately 60-80 persons. Each urn receives a quarter pound of a specific loose leaf tea, which we place in tea "socks" (in effect, tea bags, which are available at most tea specialty stores). The tea socks are filled until they are approx. half full (allowing room for expansion), and then stapled shut. **It takes a 60-cup urn approx. 1 hour to reach the proper temperature.** When the urns reach the proper temperature (which depends on the type tea being brewed – this information should be available from local tea merchant), the tea "socks" are placed in the urn to brew. We use urns with adjustable thermostats that allow us to control the temperature. After the proper brewing period, the tea socks are removed, and tea pots can be filled from the urn.

The brewing of the tea may be your greatest logistical challenge. We use DeLonghi urns with adjustable thermostats; they are available at Amazon.com for approximately \$85. This could be a very expensive investment for one tea party. One key question is: how many people will be attending? If the numbers are relatively small, you could easily use a number of tea kettles and tea pots. If you get above 20-30 people, you may want to consider either using one or more of the nursing home's coffee urns, or renting some coffee urns. Needless to say, if you use a coffee urn, you may want to run white vinegar through it to eliminate as much of the coffee smell as possible. I'm hoping that I get lots of creative solutions to this problem from participants – I'll post these solutions on the website.



Once the tea is brewed, we typically have two servers per urn who circulate throughout the room with their tea pots. It's always fun to describe the tea you're offering to the seniors – many of them get a little excited about trying something new and exotic.

## **FOOD:**

Contact the Nursing Homes early – some states have restrictions on what foods can be brought into a Nursing Home. Initially, all the food for our tea parties was

provided by volunteers who would be working at the teas, but as we began to do more and larger tea parties, we eventually began working with a caterer to provide us with some core tea food: tea sandwiches and scones, for example. Costs vary; in the Washington, DC area we have a caterer who provides us with two kinds of scones, two kinds of tea sandwiches, brownies, and strawberries – enough to feed 80 people – for about \$350. In my hometown in West Virginia, the same kind of food for 60 people costs about \$150. In both cases, we receive a discount because we are a charity, and we augment the caterer's food with homemade cucumber sandwiches, shortbread, and lemon bars. Since *Tea Across America* will occur only once a year, and many of our participants will be tea aficionados, it is very likely that you will have no need for a caterer, and that your participants will be able to provide enough tea food for the tea party.

When it comes to serving the food, you can never have enough platters. Also, to stay on the right side of the Health Department, we serve our food using tongs, and our food handlers all wear latex gloves.

### **SETTING UP:**

We set a table with a teacup and saucer, plate (nice grade paper), napkin, and teaspoon for each attendee. Each table also has a creamer and a sugar bowl – it's important that you also offer a non-sugar sweetener – we offer Splenda. When we originally conceived the idea of the tea parties, we decided that we didn't want the seniors to be drinking tea from their everyday cups and saucers, so we went on-line and asked people to donate a teacup and saucer for use by a senior. To date, we've received more than 300 pieces of fine china from good people across the U.S., as well as from Australia, Canada, India, and the U.K. We have thrown 14 tea parties to date, and (knock on wood) have never had a teacup or saucer broken. We say this because we would encourage you to attempt to arrange for the seniors to drink out of some nice china teacups and saucers. They're very careful with them and so thrilled to be drinking out of something so beautiful.

### **CLEANING UP:**

Because we wash our teacups, saucers, etc. at the nursing home (who wants to take home dirty dishes?), we clear tables as people leave. We wash our fine china by hand, since we aren't willing to risk it in the heavy duty dishwashers found at most nursing homes. Unfortunately, although we throw tea parties at several nursing homes, only one of these nursing homes washes the dishes (by hand) for us – more than likely, you'll be on your own when it comes to washing the dishes. You need to find out ahead of time where you'll be washing up. Many nursing homes have regulations which prohibit unauthorized personnel in the kitchen, thereby preventing you from using kitchen facilities. Most nursing homes, however, have activity rooms with small kitchenettes, complete with kitchen sinks that can be used to clean up.