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Hospitality Management, BS

ECU Honors College Creative Endeavor

Fall 2021

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March 11, 2020; The beginning of the end. On March 11, 2020, the students at East Carolina University received an email informing us that spring break had been extended and we would remain virtual indefinitely, little did we know what was to come in the next months. The first word that comes to mind about the ongoing pandemic is uncertainty, and that is why I have chosen to complete my signature honors project on creating events during a global pandemic. Being a hospitality student entering my senior year during a pandemic has caused anxiety and unrest in my life, as well as many others. I know that the career field I dreamed of being a part of 2 years ago is not the field I will be entering in December. Hospitality as we know it has completely changed. To ease my fear and that of others, I want to create and execute a hospitality event during a global pandemic to show that it is possible.

This project is ultimately important because of the impact COVID-19 has had on the hospitality industry. Although things are slowly starting to return to normal, we have no clear end to the abnormalities of society right now. This project helped show how we can continue with events and social activities through a pandemic. This pandemic is creating a new focus for recent hospitality graduates. “This pandemic is also likely to have a significant impact on the research agenda of hospitality marketing and management scholars. With unprecedented challenges faced by the hospitality industry in the COVID-19 era, hospitality scholars are expected to shift their research focus to develop solutions for the industry” (Gursoy 2020). Instead of just developing skills to manage positions in the hospitality field, recent graduates are charged with the task of finding solutions in hospitality during a pandemic. This project allows me to research and develop new ways to host events during COVID-19 and gives me the experience I will need upon graduation.

To execute my event, I partnered with the Honors College and my mentor Dr. Hamilton of the School of Hospitality Leadership to plan and present a birthday party for the Honors College. The event took place on April 28, 2021, at the Mamie Jenkins building. Every year the Honors College usually hosts a homecoming event in the fall at Brock's Farm, but due to COVID-19 this event was not able to take place in 2020. Since 2021 happened to be the tenth anniversary of the Honors College, we decided to combine the Homecoming celebration and the anniversary celebration into one big birthday party.

The first step in planning an event is finding a location. We decided to host the event at Mamie Jenkins since this is a central location for all honors students and staff, along with being a familiar location for alumni. Most people don't see all the behind the scenes work in the hospitality industry. Leading up to events there are multiple meetings between planners and those involved in the process. For the Birthday Party we had to plan marketing, decorations, timing, set up, and much more. After each of these sectors had been discussed we were finally able to set a plan for the event. After planning the event, we had to gain interest by marketing the event. We developed a marketing plan for the party by highlighting our alumni. We created portfolios for different alumni over the years and once each week leading up to the birthday party, we highlighted these profiles on the Honors College Instagram story. This marketing strategy allowed us to use our own resources to promote the event. Along with the alumni portfolios we also promoted the birthday party on all social media platforms through posts.

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The image shows an Instagram post from the account 'ecu_honors'. The post features a collage of three photos: a man in a suit (Joshua Mosakowski), a woman with red hair (Victoria Neff), and a couple in wedding attire (Michael Denning). The text identifies each person and their graduation year. The post includes interaction buttons for 'View Insights' and 'Boost Post', a row of icons for liking, commenting, and sharing, and a notification that it was liked by 'krisl mart and 111 others'. The caption reads: 'We are continuing our #happybirthdayECUHonors alumni spotlights with Joshua, Michael & Victoria! Keep an eye out today to learn more about them.' The date 'April 13' is visible at the bottom.

ecu_honors

Joshua Mosakowski
Class of 2014

Victoria Neff
Class of 2015

Michael Denning
Class of 2019

[View Insights](#) [Boost Post](#)

♥ 💬 📌

Liked by krisl mart and 111 others

ecu_honors We are continuing our #happybirthdayECUHonors alumni spotlights with Joshua, Michael & Victoria! Keep an eye out today to learn more about them.

April 13

Photo Courtesy of ECU Social Media

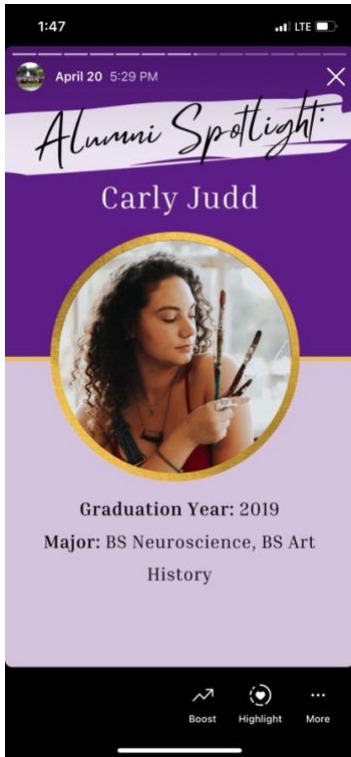


Photo Courtesy of ECU Social Media



Photo Courtesy of ECU Social Media

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After the months of planning, it was time to execute the event. While working on this event I was the Programming Chair for the Honors College Student Council, so I was able to utilize the Honors Council members to help set up the event. We were able to have the event both inside and outside at Mamie Jenkins. Inside the building we had cupcakes, snacks, and prizes for guests. Outside the building we had seating and different games to play like cornhole and even a 10” pinata. The whole building was decorated in purple and gold and felt nostalgic of your own tenth birthday party growing up.



Photo Courtesy of Kristen Martin



Photo Courtesy of Kristen Martin

The most important step in planning this event was making sure all parts of the event were following COVID-19 protocol. Thankfully this event was in April of 2021 so protocols were not as strict as they may have been the year before. This does not mean that we did not have to account for many things. The biggest task was making sure that all students wore masks both inside and outside, since this was campus policy, we had to always enforce this rule. According to the East Carolina Spring 2021 Return to Campus Guidelines, “Face coverings are required for students, faculty, staff and visitors in all ECU buildings and in all university, programs held in non-university buildings. This includes wearing face coverings at all times in classrooms and laboratories. Face coverings will also be required in outdoor spaces on campus property where appropriate physical distancing cannot be guaranteed” (ECU, 2021). We also made sure all the guests ate their food outside, so if they did remove their masks, it was while

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outdoor and social distanced. We took temperatures outside of the building, and we had each guest sign in, so we had a record of everyone who had attended.



Photo Courtesy of Kristen Martin

The pandemic has forever changed the hospitality industry, and we will probably never fully return to a “pre-pandemic” way of life. These new protocols are the new normal, and I wanted to use this project to explore how to give the best experience to consumers while having to use rules and regulations. Upon graduation I plan to enter the field of corporate event planning or luxury hotel management, this project allowed me to learn and grow as a hospitality industry member.

References

- Dogan Gursoy & Christina G. Chi (2020) Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on hospitality industry: review of the current situations and a research agenda, *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 29:5, 527-529, DOI: 10.1080/19368623.2020.1788231
- ECU. (2021). *Navigating Spring 2021: Guidelines for Safety on Campus*. Return of Pirate Nation. Retrieved December 9, 2021, from https://returnofpiratenation.ecu.edu/wp-content/pv-uploads/sites/518/2020/07/21-0834_Spring_2021_Students_Return_to_Campus_Updated_Guidelines-FINAL.pdf.