

PHOENIX

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Lifestyle

Cool, Man

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The Party Priestess: Raven Valdes

She would get asked the same thing over and over, whenever the weekend approached. Her girlfriends, guys she knew, all of them wanted hints, recommendations. A few thousand questions in, Raven Valdes had an epiphany.

"Everyone wanted to know, 'Hey, Raven, what are you doing tonight? Is there anything good going on?'" she recalls. "I guess I

became sort of a directory people went to. Where to go? What to do? Then I guess it kind of took off."

"Kind of took off" is as close to an understatement as you'll get from the owner of Raven Events, the divorced mother of a 9-year-old boy who's taken her knack for finding a good time and become one of the Valley's premier event planners and party promoters. Valdes' plunging necklines, ink-black mane, bulging guest lists and neon energy level all scream a single word.

"Fun," she says. "All I bring people is fun. I don't sell them anything except fun. There's never a conflict of interest with me. If it's a Raven event, you know it'll be nothing but fun."

Sophisticated, business-casual fun – that's been Valdes' forte since going pro as a social queen bee in 2004. While her competition focuses on 20-something college kids, Valdes, 49, has found a niche with fun-seekers in their 30s, 40s and up – including a 94-year-old who's been attending her bashes of late. Raven's strategy? Don't make people drive too far (she favors venues like Jilly's and the Crown Room in Scottsdale, along with Trax and Phase 54 in Tempe), give them great music and great food (she'll bring in DJs and caterers, if need be) and spread the word like crazy.



Photo by Jeff Newton

Raven Valdes

Valdes markets events digitally, e-mailing calendars and invites to a database of more than 10,000 Valley professionals. Their loyalty ensures a mob scene whenever she throws a charity ball, New Year's theme party or happy hour business mixer. At the center of each bash, there's Raven, big hair and megawatt grin, a Texas-born military brat who's lived all over the United States but has found a home and a few thousand friends here in Phoenix.

"This is my passion, and I'm good at it," she says. "I get a lot of reward just sitting back and watching the connections take place."