

PARTY



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Plan a classic kids' celebration with help from two local experts.

HEARTY



Gretchen Fleener's love of face painting started early. When she was 15, the Mound resident began face painting at Valleyfair during her summer vacations. Since then, she's built her own business selling face painting supplies, written books on face painting and spoken at conferences as far away as Belgium.

"I have always been an artist," Fleener says. "I come from an artistic family. My sister did caricatures, which is how I heard about face painting."

Fleener went to school for graphic and industrial design, which led to a career designing retail fixtures for Best Buy before she decided to pursue face painting full time. "It is a great way to do what I love and make money at it," Fleener says. "It's been a way to stay home with my boys and have a nice flexible schedule."

Fleener's sons, who are 8 and 10, are willing participants when it comes to her craft. One of her sons let her paint an entire ugly Christmas sweater on his chest, which ended up being the Christmas card for Fleener's business, Paintertainment.

"I started my little online store in 2005. I had so many people calling me up [who had been] asked to volunteer at school and church, and they had no idea what paint to use or where to start," Fleener says. "I put together a kit of basic supplies so they'd have something professional

ASK AWAY

Paintertainment's Gretchen Fleener shares the questions she always asks professional entertainers.

1. Are you insured?
2. Do you have references or reviews?
3. Are all of your supplies safe for use on skin?
4. What is your company's dress code?
5. Is this your full-time job?
6. How often do you attend workshops or conventions?
7. Do you train artists from the ground up to work for you?
8. Do you have a backup if you're ill or can't make it?
9. Will you provide a contract?
10. Are you among the cheapest artists in the area?



PAPER CHAIN
STREAMERS

PLANNING A CLASSIC KIDS' BIRTHDAY PARTY

Has reading about face painting inspired you to plan an old-fashioned party for your child? We asked local party planner Jen Goetz, owner of Styled for Bliss in Excelsior, for her tips.

INVITATIONS

"Invitations should definitely be hand-made," Goetz says. "One fun idea is to create a cootie catcher." Remember these? It's a folded paper game that uses your fingers to count and then open different flaps that reveal information. In this case, each flap includes a piece of info about the party: when, where and other details.

If you're planning for younger kids or want something with less folding, try a big paper lollipop in primary colors.

GUEST LIST

"The guest list should depend on the age of the child and also their comfort level with social situations," Goetz says. "Too many

children at a party can sometimes lead to the birthday child feeling overwhelmed ... It's also important to make sure that there are enough children at the party so all the guests have someone to play and interact with." Invite an even number of children to avoid anyone feeling let out. Goetz says 10 kids or fewer is a good place to start.

EATS

Don't worry—a large meal isn't necessary. Goetz suggests serving a variety of snacks and finger foods. Try classics like pigs in a blanket, ants on a log, popcorn, milk and cookies, and sweet treats like pixie sticks, rainbow lollipops and cupcakes or cake with multicolored sprinkles.

DECORATIONS

Get back to basics and make traditional party props cool again. You know what we mean: handmade multicolored paper chain

streamers—your kids can help make these for a fun craft project—party hats, pinwheels, kaleidoscopes and multicolored balloons.

DANCE FLOOR

"Musical chairs, the Limbo and the Hokey Pokey are great ways to incorporate music into the party," Goetz says. "When selecting music, avoid any current songs. For games like these, choose instrumental band music or kids' songs without the lyrics" so everyone can sing along, and for background tunes that aren't too distracting.

ACTIVITIES

"There are so many classic party games that are simple to prepare," says Goetz. Of course, face painting is a perennial favorite. "A balloon artist could also be hired to create fun balloon creatures, or [you can set up] a photo booth with various

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FORTUNE TELLER
INVITATIONS

“

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GRETCHEN FLEENER

and safe.” Fleener ships orders directly from her house.

Along with running her online store, Fleener is busy with face painting events all over the Twin Cities. “I do a lot of birthday parties. I've even done weddings, corporate picnics and holiday parties,” Fleener says. “I've done country club events, and church and school events. It's really across the board.”

Fleener has a booth at the Carver County Fair each year, but is mostly hired to do hourly parties.

She always tries to come prepared with designs related to that child's interest. These days, some of her most popular designs are unicorns, rainbows, sharks and dinosaurs.

But occasionally requests tend toward the weird. “Some unique requests I've had recently include the giant words ‘you are here,’ with an arrow pointing to the kid's nose; specific dog breeds and colors to match their pet; and an eyeball on the back of a bald man's head,” Fleener says with a laugh. “I painted a dragonfly on a real alligator's nose once. He was part of a petting zoo at the party.”

And Fleener doesn't just paint faces or alligator noses. “I do a lot of arm painting, especially on really little kids who are nervous and haven't had it done before,” she says. “I paint pregnant bellies, too, which is really fun. The last one I did was a Finding Nemo theme. They make for

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clothes and props,” Goetz says.

Then add activities like:

- Musical chairs
- Pin the tail on the donkey
- Clothespin drop into a bottle
- Pick-up sticks
- Hopscotch
- Jacks
- Parachute

BEHIND THE SCENES

To keep your own stress levels down, Goetz recommends enlisting the help of other grown-ups. You can hire a party planner, or ask friends or neighbors for a little help. Another way to reduce the chaos? Make sure the party has a definite end time—and enforce it. “Kids get very excited and often participate in the party at a high energy level. If the party lasts too long, it can be a recipe for stress for both the kids and the parents,” Goetz says. “Two to three hours is a good time frame for a party.” If it’s too much to host the party in your own family room, find a different venue where set-up and cleanup is easier.

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(Special thanks to Fleener's
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designs for this story)



Gretchen Fleener

fun pictures for baby books.”

Fleener is part of a large community of face painters in the Twin Cities. She hosts “paint jams” once a month with other artists, where they share their tips and tricks. She’s also the editor of a quarterly face and body art magazine, *Wet Paint Magazine*. “I’ve taught workshops in New Jersey, Belgium and here in Minnesota,” Fleener says. “I have also spoken at local business conferences for entertainers.”

Along with her art, Fleener is passion-

ate about helping people hire reputable professional entertainers. “There are a lot of artists out there who use unsafe products, those who don’t carry insurance and those who back out at the last minute and leave you hanging. I get a lot of calls from hysterical party planners who lost their artist at the last minute. Cheap does not mean a good deal in those cases,” Fleener says.

So she’s created an entire guide for hiring party entertainers, which can be found at paintertainment.com. ◆

