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Call Us

Many business find maintaining family ownership through the generations difficult. Tell us your story, and we'll include it in a future edition of Inside Business.

As always, we invite your feedback.

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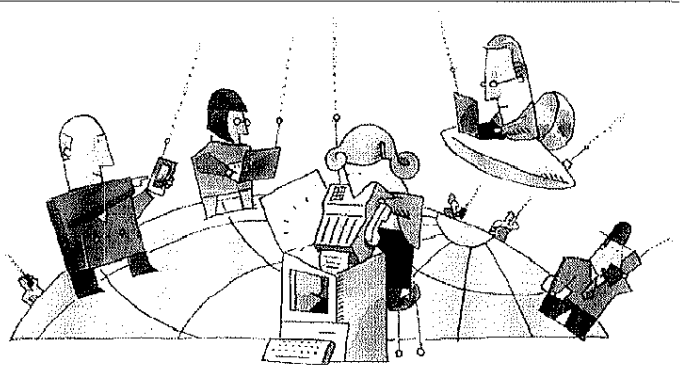
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THE LOOP



Mystery troupe clues-in company shindigs

Photos by Jane Turnis/The Gazette

*A feather whisked out of a hand.
 A heart drawn on a sugar packet.
 A ransom note.
 A murder.
 A heated discussion of suspicions and accusations.
 Applause.*

On a recent weeknight at the **Briarhurst Manor Inn** in Manitou Springs, about 190 paralegals, all members of the National Association of Legal Assistants, filed into a dining room for cocktails and dinner.

Minutes later, a blonde flapper dressed in pink fringe and feathers staggered, pigeon-toed and with drink in hand, down the stairs and into the crowd. She wasn't alone in her wardrobe choice: several paralegals — clued in to the night's theme — had donned fedoras, sequined headbands, feather boas and long beads.

Definitely not your typical corporate dinner.

Tipsy Irene, played by Celeste Perkins, was the first of eight characters in "Murder Speaks Easy" to mix in for "schmooze time," or cocktail hour.

It's no mystery that **Red Herring Productions** has found a scheme for success.

The Colorado Springs theater group started 13 years ago presenting hard-to-crack murder mysteries at the Old Colorado City mystery bookstore, **Book Sleuth**. Now it performs about 75 shows a year for corporate conventions and company parties all over Colorado.

The team is calculated about its approach.

"Our mission is to break 'em up, let them get to know people they don't know in the company," said Don Moon, a Red Herring partner along with Chris Daley, Mike Stevens and Donna Vessey.

Sometimes the actors are asked to incorporate a real-life business situation into their story.

"We were used by a pharmaceutical company — its national sales force to help break the bad news about a product they were selling," Moon said. "We played a parallel company invited along, and we wanted to kill the CEO, the bearer of bad news. In our scenario, the bad guy has bad news, but we show that it's not all



Donna Vessey, at left, depicting Roxie Potts, talks to members of the National Association of Legal Assistants at a convention, before performing a murder mystery by Red Herring Productions. Celeste Perkins, below, plays the flapper Irene in the same production.



They peppered Mildred and Police Commissioner Seymour Carlton (Trisha Dudding and Leo Bush) with questions.

"Do you have investments in the Black Orchid?"

"There've been suspicious accidents? Like what?"

"Do you have any evidence on Fast Eddie?"

Nancy Sanders, legal administrator at GTE in St. Petersburg, Fla., explained: "As paralegals, we're used to throwing out the questions."

Jill Piasecki of Dallas returned from the women's room bursting with information.

"Boy, if you want clues, go to the bathroom. I heard that Mildred was a dancer before she married Seymour — and he doesn't know that — and that Roxie is pregnant," she said. "And there were so many feathers in there, I think someone's molting."

Around & About Tours & Events Inc. booked Red Herring for the NALA dinner. Other jobs come through Meeting Planners and Convention Suppliers connections, the Colorado Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau and agents.

An average show for a 200-person event — with themes ranging from the Wild West to Victorian to corporate murder — costs about \$750; the price depends on audience size.

The group's Web site, www.redherringproductions.com, spells it all out.

bad news. We broke down some barriers."

Red Herring shows bolster good business skills, too, Moon said.

The mechanics of a murder mystery — where individuals gather clues, then come together as a team and present their findings through a team captain — are similar to the problem-solving required by corporate culture.

The paralegals dug in early, gathering clues even before the "murder" had been committed.