

# Make your customers

# MELT



The *catersource* Buffet Contest gave Chateau Lamothe just the opportunity it needed to create a little “Wow!”

Doris LaMott Hoel had been looking for something special for a while. “I had been thinking for years about how to come up with a standard display that doesn’t cost an arm and a leg, that can be flexible and that looks great,” she says. “I always want to offer my brides something that is a Wow!”

Then last fall she got an email about the *catersource* Buffet Contest, part of the annual Conference & Tradeshow in Las Vegas last January. It was just the prompt she needed. Starting only three weeks before the conference, she came up with the idea of using standard glass blocks, easily available at Home Depot or other building and home supply stores.

Before buying blocks, however, she practiced. “I worked with crackers. I starting building different things with crackers to see how many glass blocks I should buy,” she says. “It took me a while to figure it out, and then I thought, ‘Omigosh, this is it.’” LaMott built an “ice” structure that won’t melt and that can serve as a display for virtually any kind of menu items.

The Ice Palace (pictured at left) didn’t win any awards in the Buffet Contest, but that almost doesn’t matter; it’s become a staple for Hoel’s catering business. She’s been doing off-premise catering for more than 20 years and recently opened the Chateau Lamothe in Burnsville, MN. The Ice Palace—or one version of it—is now in the alcove of the banquet facility, “where it is our greeting when people walk in.” She’s planning a complimentary Ice Palace hors d’oeuvre bar for potential clients, to impress them with both the food and the display as they’re considering her catering services.

Glass blocks cost between \$40 and \$80 a case, depending on the style. Hoel keeps the boxes so she can load up the blocks and transport them easily for an off-site event. She now has 11 cases, because she bought six more in Las Vegas for the competition and then transported them home. With that many blocks, she can experiment with different shapes of ice structures. **CS**