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Sandra Eliasberg (left) races to pour a glass of water into a jug on the forehead of attorney Shawn Drummond during a water relay race at the Trott & Trott company picnic in Bingham Farms last week. Some 500 employees of the law firm and its sister companies took part in the \$10,000 bash.

*Morale-boosting company picnics survive even in a tight economy*

BY MARGARITA BAUZA  
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**A** drenched Lindsay Nelson jumped up and down when the whistle blew, declaring her team the winner of the company water relay.

"We didn't train but we did have a strategy," she said breathlessly while congratulating her teammates following a big win in a contest that consisted of using Dixie cups to fill up a bottle balanced on a coworker's head.

"We just had to take our time and get the water in the hole," she says.

Nelson, a legal processor from Wixom, was among 500 employees of the Bingham Farms law firm Trott & Trott and its sister companies who

## Cutting loose from the cubicle

took part in a \$10,000 summer bash in the company's parking lot.

The lot was transformed into a circus-like fete featuring a giant tent, a karaoke machine, dunk tanks, steamy hot dogs and ice-cold beverages for an afternoon of entertainment and corporate bonding.

CEO David Trott walked around in shorts, lunching with employees. Jeff Weisserman, supervising attorney of litigation, was dunked in frigid waters for a half-hour straight. Employees ran like wild children, squirting each other with water guns and getting a chance to humiliate cubemates, all in fun.

Call it a picnic day, a family day or a summer bash. Some consider it annual forced fun in corporate

America. For others, it's an opportunity to bond and mingle. For workers who rarely get face time with the boss, it's a time to mix in a relaxed atmosphere.

Experts say that despite a grim economic climate in Michigan (the unemployment rate is among the nation's highest, 7% in July), a good party is worth spending money on.

At Trott & Trott, rewarding employees with a little fun pays off, says Trott.

"We've found that for as big as we are, it's worth doing," he says, adding that the event has been tweaked to maximize its punch.

Three years ago, the firm moved the summer bash from a weekend day to a weekday so more people could participate. Turnout is now 100%





The Trott & Trott picnic took place right in the law firm's parking lot. By giving employees time off on a work day, the event has achieved 100% participation.

and workers love sanctioned goof-off time.

Mekisha Nevils, 31, of Ferndale admitted that little gets done the afternoon after the picnic ends (it runs from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.), and the cheer begins way before the picnic and lasts for weeks after that.

"We've been planning this for months," says Nevils, who has worked at Trott & Trott for 3 1/2 years. "It makes for a nice atmosphere. It's a nice company."

The morale boost began with the preparations. Employees campaigned for a month to get selected for a dunking in the water tank. The person with the most contributions got dunked. All money raised -- more than \$3,000 -- went to Big Brothers Big Sisters. Every year, employees select a different charity.

"I love this job, but I really love this company," says Nelson, who says she recruits people to join Trott & Trott when she knows of openings.

Coworker Joanne Madej, 23, of Redford Township says participating in fund-raising is fun. "People are happy—they're raising money and they're contributing," says a drenched Madej, a relay teammate who is also a legal processor.

The majority of U.S. companies host a company picnic or some sort of summer event, according to a 2005 survey from the Society for Human Resources Management in Alexandria, Va. That's about 60% of companies, a drop from 67% in 2002, says spokesman Frank Scanlan.

Scanlan says the drop is not significant considering the lackluster economy.

"It's gone down a little bit; it could be a cost-saving measure, but employees might also be saying that they want to have something else.

"It helps in creating a good workplace," he says. "When (employees) are happy, they're invested. Happy employees are good employees."

Not having parties can prove a lot more expensive than having them, says Scanlan.

The average cost per hire in the U.S. this year was \$7,123 per employee, he says. It takes about 37 days to fill a position, and with an average turnover rate of 10%-15%, costs can escalate quickly.

It's a lot cheaper to keep employees than it is to recruit new ones," he says. "In addition, it helps with morale, better culture and better productivity."

It's that sort of payoff that companies look for when investing in family activities.

At DaimlerChrysler Services, a family day this Saturday is expected to draw more than 2,000

employees and their families to an outing on Inkster Road in Farmington Hills, says spokeswoman Amber Paauwe.

"The idea behind it is to have it revolve around inviting families in. People spend so much time at work, it's good for families to see where people sit, where they work."

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## How to behave at a company picnic

■ Even if office functions are not your cup of tea, you need to make an appearance.

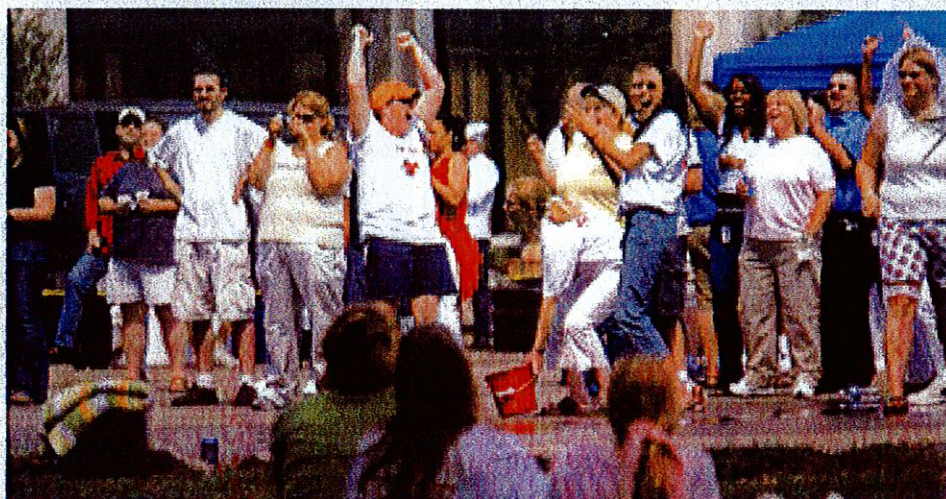
■ Be sure to acknowledge your coworkers and bosses. Introduce your spouse or date.

■ Avoid drinking too much. It may be the No. 1 cause of inappropriate remarks and behavior.

■ Avoid pigging out. Loading up your plate or grabbing handfuls of hors d'oeuvres does not present a flattering image.

■ Go along with games or other activities.

Source: [ehow.com](http://ehow.com).



The picnic for employees of Trott & Trott was held for three hours, but the good feeling lasts.