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Double Honours for Knebworth House at Eventia Awards

Sodexo at Knebworth House demonstrated itself as the premier venue for delivering exceptional events by winning not only the **GOLD Award** but also the **Best Use of Venue's Facilities award** at the first ever Eventia Corporate Event (CE) Awards, held at The Hurlingham Club on Thursday 30th November 2006.

Created to honour creativity, logistical excellence and best practice within the industry that produces events for business, the Eventia CE Awards brought together a host of venues, caterers, production companies and event management agencies, to spotlight those organisations that had produced the most outstanding events and service in the UK during the last year.

Awards ranged from 'Best Hospitality Offer' to 'Production Agency of the Year', however, top spot was reserved for the climatic gold 'Event of the Year Award' which was taken home by Sodexo's very own Knebworth House team.

Knebworth House with its large parks and grounds, ample facilities and large stately rooms is particularly well suited for all styles of events, securing the success of many. Able to accommodate all manner of occasions, both public and corporate, from enormous outdoor concerts, to classic dinners, seminars and conferences, drinks receptions or outdoor events for up to 125,000 guests.

It made an ideal setting for Hedgestock, a three-day conference and networking event for the hedge fund community, which ran from 7-8 June 2006. Created and produced by Albourne Partners, facilities at Hedgestock included flower-power vans, beach huts for meeting rooms and tents sponsored by prime brokers, including Merrill Lynch, UBS and Morgan Stanley. There were over 5,000 attendees and all profits were donated to the Teenage Cancer Trust.

The facilities at Knebworth House were used to their fullest, with every element of the property and grounds being used in some way. More than 100 speakers, over 3,000 one-to-one meetings, 20 conference panels, 16 presentations and industry's only democratic award ceremony - the Grannies, took place over the two days. In addition, several events hosted by the 10 Founding Sponsors were held inside Knebworth House and Barns and there were over 60 exhibitors in the Tented Village. For fun, there was a choice of sporting events from polo to cricket, playing out to the tune of Radio Hedgestock which was broadcasting from Knebworth House to a five mile radius. A grand finale rock concert with Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend reforming 'The Who' was the headline act.

The catering was a feat in itself - run by Jason Richards and Marcie Warden of Sodexo's Relish The Experience, and Sodexo's senior sales manager at Knebworth House, Niamh Long, they managed 18 operational areas and ensured that the food, drinks and service for 3,000 guests and 1,000 support crew were of the highest order.

The whole event was very informal, and the catering requirements on the day had to match the experience by providing a wide range of options, 18 were available in total including:

- A barbecue for 90 guests on the cricket pitch for the Bank of Canada
- Cheese, wine and ale tasting in the Knebworth Barns for Barclays
- The Knebworking restaurant catering for 1,000 guests in under 90 minutes
- High tea served by butlers on the front lawn
- Pimm's served in the Bear Stearns hot air balloon
- Canapés and drinks in six hospitality double-deckers
- Exclusive barbecue in the formal gardens in quintessential English surroundings

In addition to this, Knebworth operations team catered for over 1,000 crew, as well as backstage catering for The Who, which involved successfully sourcing 12 litres of US energy drink Gatorade, not commonly available in the UK, with just 12 hours notice. On site, golf buggies, bikes and vans were used to cover the ground quickly due to the large distances at Knebworth between the kitchens, stock room, gazebos and exhibition stands.

Feedback has shown that the event exceeded expectations. Nora Quain, Corporate Events Manager, Bear Stearns Europe said, "I would give them (Relish the Experience) 11 out of 10 for their service. They were really professional, tuned in and approachable. At the last minute we had to make changes but this was no problem for the team and they were flexible and responsive to our needs - the staff on-site were very calm under pressure."

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