

BY ELIZABETH COOK
STAFF WRITER

Three local event planners learned there's power in numbers when they combine their forces.

Cookie Coleman, Char Mason and Patrick Frederick are a team who started working together in 2004 during the Grand Excursion, a festival celebrating communities along the Mississippi from Iowa and Illinois up to Minneapolis and St. Paul. Mason was working with communication and outreach for the regional events, while Coleman and Frederick worked on the ending ceremony in the Twin Cities.

Launchings

We profile startups headed by notable entrepreneurs.

Though each runs an independent business, this year they began to market themselves as a team in a joint enterprise, Mason Coleman and Frederick.

Coleman, a local jazz musician, is the executive director of the Cookie Coleman Co., an event-planning business that's been running for more than 20 years. Her specialty is the entertainment part of an event.

Frederick, who produces corporate events, also is a musician and has been performing with Coleman for 15 years. With his more than 30 years experience in the music industry, it is no wonder he is the creative musical director for the group's events.

"I kind of learned it from the talent side," he said.

Mason, who met Coleman in the late 1980s while working for International Market Square in Minneapolis, is the CEO for Char Mason & Associates, an event and communications business.

With years of experience in the event-planning industry, and each with a specialized niche, the partners can quickly and easily pull resources from many different directions and previous contacts.

"We together, jointly, have three pieces of the pie," Mason said.

They collaborated on the SPAM Museum Jam in 2005 and 2006, the inaugural events for St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman and the reception at the Walker Art Center for the Democratic National Site Committee.

They also teamed up for the Minneapolis Institute of Arts' grand opening of its new wing. The planning for the gala celebration took two and a half years.

These high-profile events are good publicity for the trio. Minnesota Public Radio hired them to plan its celebration of its headquarters expansion in September. Christina Schmitt, a spokeswoman for MPR, said the St. Paul-based nonprofit was impressed by the reputation of the three planners, especially with the opening of the art museum.

One advantage of the trio is that because the group has no central office or additional employees, it can operate on a lean budget with minimal overhead. This lowers the overall cost for its clients, as well.

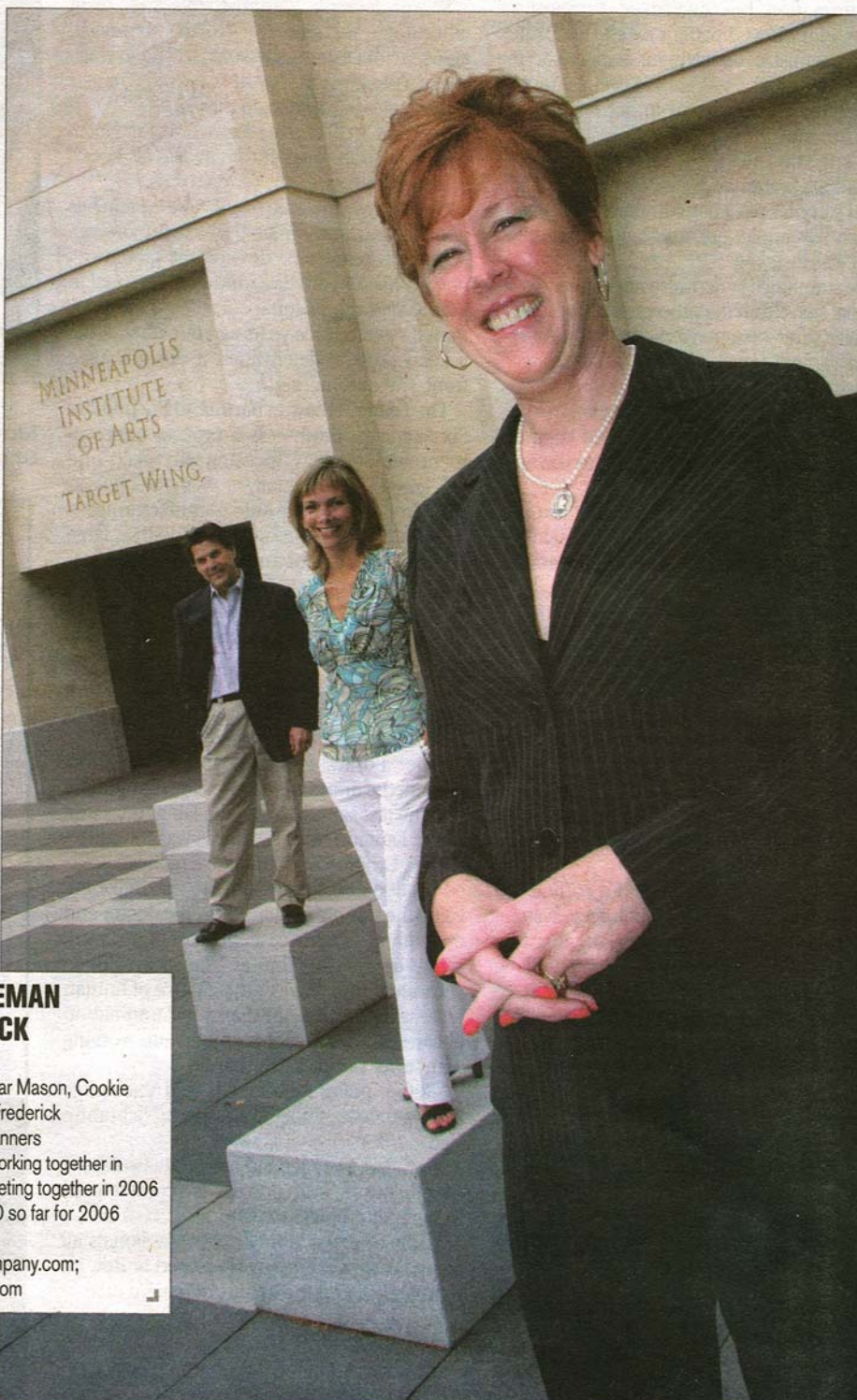
When large event-planning firms tackle a project, the fees are usually double, Coleman said.

Another independent event planner, Kathy Bardins, agrees with the value provided by smaller firms. She's the CEO of Plymouth-based Bardins Communications, which coordinated the WomenVenture Annual Conference and the Ann Bancroft awards last year.

But Bardins also acknowledges the benefit in working closely with a few people: They are able to exchange ideas with each other.

These event planners found that three heads are better than one for some high-profile galas

Planners unite for the Big Event



MASON, COLEMAN AND FREDERICK

City: Minneapolis

Top executives: Char Mason, Cookie Coleman and Pat Frederick

Business: Event planners

Founded: Started working together in 2004. Started marketing together in 2006

Revenue: \$499,000 so far for 2006

Employees: 3

Web sites: cococompany.com; www.CharMason.com

Cookie Coleman, foreground, teamed with Char Mason and Pat Frederick on the opening of the new wing at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.