

FROM BIKE RACES TO COCKTAILS: HOW HEC'S OPENING EVENTS HAVE CHANGED



The way Hotel Ezra Cornell (HEC) starts has changed a lot over the years. In the past, the weekend began with fun and unique events meant to be attention grabbers for media and potential guests like bike races and cake competitions. Today, it opens with a classy cocktail reception, reflecting the evolution of both HEC and the hospitality industry.



In 1950, HEC kicked off with a bike race. Students from HEC, along with teams from famous hotels like the Waldorf-Astoria, competed in a race from Syracuse to Ithaca. It wasn't just about speed, though—there was also a costume contest, so competitors had a chance to show off their creativity while pedaling. After completing the race, awards were given out to the fastest and best-dressed racers.

Two years later, in 1952, the opening event was a cake competition. Hotelie students went up against co-eds from the School of Home Economics to see who could bake the best cakes. The cakes were beautifully decorated and judged by a panel of experts. Afterward, the winning cakes were paraded through town and served during a "Cake Walk" dance, where guests even dressed in bakery uniforms. And, in true HEC fashion, the proceeds from the event went to a local children's charity.

Today, HEC starts in a very different way. The weekend now begins with a formal cocktail reception. Instead of racing bikes or baking cakes, industry professionals gather to network over drinks and appetizers. It's a more polished, professional event, designed to foster connections in the hospitality industry. While the style has changed, the goal remains the same. Whether it's through a bike race, a cake competition, or a cocktail party, HEC's opening event has always been about bringing people together. The fun and casual spirit of the past has evolved into a more formal atmosphere, but the tradition of hospitality and connection continues.