

Wedding Bells



Two local features:

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GASCONADE
COUNTY
Republican

WEDNESDAY, FEB. 12, 2020



A chance love story

Scott and Megan Hillis, Aug. 3, 2019

by Roxie Murphy, Gasconade County Republican Feature Writer

For some couples, love comes a little slower to one person than it does to the other. That's what happened to Megan Walker (Hillis) and husband Scott Hillis in 2014 at a Cardinals home game in St. Louis.

A chance meeting

"We first met at a Cardinals game," Scott said of his bride. "Megan was there with her co-workers. I was there with my brother and his wife. His wife works in the same school building as Megan. The conversation pretty much went, 'Hey, want to go to a Cardinals game?' and I said 'sure.'"

Scott was introduced to all of his sister-in-law's co-workers before the first pitch.

"Then for the rest of the game, it was just my brother and I hanging out," Scott said.

Megan laughs about this story. "I always think this story is kind of funny because I don't even remember meeting Scott at that Cardinals game," Megan said. "I always say that we met at Belair (School District in Jefferson City) when we started working together."

Scott went to work for Belair School District years later as a special education teacher, which is the "first meeting" Megan talks about.

"We would run into each other and talk every now and then," Megan said. "In June of 2018, we both worked summer school back at Belair where it all began. We reconnected over those four weeks."

During the final week of summer school, Scott asked Megan to go for a walk with him.

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Dinner or a walk in the park?

“I see us as having two different ‘first dates,’” Scott said. “They were two totally different experiences.”

The first of the ‘first dates’ was a dinner date.

“This would really be the first time Megan and I were on our own together,” Scott said. “All I remember was thinking ‘Scott, please do not act like a dork.’”

The second “first date” was literally a walk in the park — Binder Park.

“This date to me really opened my heart to how amazing Megan is,” Scott said. “All we did was walk and talk. So simple, but we learned so much about each other.”

“It was a beautiful day and he was so easy to talk to,” she added.

So, this is love

Those two first dates were the start of something special. Half a year into their relationship, Scott attended his first family Christmas with Megan.

“After having Christmas with Megan’s family, I remember thinking, ‘I can’t wait to be a part of this amazing family.’” Scott said. “100 percent, without a doubt, I was the first one to think Megan was ‘the one.’”

Megan was a little slower to the game.

“Scott for sure knew first! I am more of a reserved, keep-to-myself kind of person,” the fourth-grade teacher said. “It took me a while to let him be ‘the one.’”

The couple was getting close to their one year anniversary, and Scott knew he was going to propose to Megan. Two months before he planned to propose, he went to Buchroeders Jewelers in Colum-

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A special thanks to these couples for sharing their stories.

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bia to have her ring designed.

“I had an idea as to what I wanted, and they helped put it all together for me,” Scott said.

Then he had that much time to be nervous and come up with a plan.

“I told Scott I wanted a proposal that was private and included just us,” Megan said. “I also didn’t want a lot of people to know about it beforehand.”

She knew a proposal was coming, because they had talked about it before, but had no idea that this was the day.

Time to propose

On Oct. 26, 2018, HaHa Tonka Missouri State Park turned out to be the perfect location for what Scott had in mind.

“If you have never been to this park, it has lots of beautiful, natural land formations,” he said. “I was going to wait for a while down the trail to propose, but we came to the first spot and as we were taking it all in, I asked Megan if she could locate us on a map.”

Scott handed Megan a massive map of the park, and as she was unfolding it, he kneeled down.

“I got down on a knee waiting for her to put (the map) down,” Scott said. “I asked her to marry me and I am pretty sure I took her breath away.”

“We almost didn’t even go to HaHa Tonka,” Megan said. “It was a cold, rainy, and cloudy day for October. However,

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MEGAN SHARES a moment with her sister Allison after the wedding.



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THE BRIDAL party spent time walking in downtown Owensville where all the lights are bright.

Hillis • from page 4B

the location was still perfect. We had gone on a date there before because I had never been. In the end, it made perfect sense for him to propose there.”

A hometown wedding for a hometown girl

Megan and her family are from Owensville, so deciding where she wanted to get married wasn't hard.

“Since the wedding was in Owensville, the planning went very smoothly,” Megan said. “Working with local businesses was a piece of cake. Choosing our date was pretty easy too.”

Megan and Scott are both teachers, so it stood to reason they would be married in the summer months while school was out of session. Luckily, they both wanted a summer wedding anyway.

“Based on our schedules and our families' schedules, all of June and July was out! August 3 was really our only option if we wanted to fit the wedding and honeymoon in before the beginning of the school year.”

I think I wanna marry you... Still deciding

“Every girl wants a “PinterestPerfect” wedding,” Megan admitted. “I started my Pinterest board long before Scott and I even

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Winter scene photo from Vail Colorado by John Martin.



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met. I wanted my wedding and reception to be somewhat rustic, yet classic and simple.”

Still, Megan struggled with a color scheme.

“I honestly wasn’t sure what color scheme I wanted to go with,” she said. “David’s Bridal runs a great deal where they will send you sample swatches for a minimal price. Once I received my samples in the mail, I chose my color pretty quickly.”

She hired Nancy Gann with “I Do” Weddings, Events, and Decor in Owensville to make that dream come true.

“Nancy did a perfect job of creating what I had envisioned. I continued to add to the board and sent her pictures along the way, and she put it all together perfectly!” Megan said.

While Megan was bringing the planning together, Scott had a job too.

“I let Scott choose what color tuxes and shoes he wanted,” she said. “He chose gray tuxes with brown shoes. I thought those colors looked great with the maroon bridesmaid dresses.”

Scott wanted to be there when Megan needed him to help.

“For the big day, I really wanted to make sure she knew I cared about the planning,” he said. “When she asked questions, I wanted to give solid answers.”

Some suggestions were obviously shot down, but Scott said Megan has a better eye for decorating.

“I am just so blessed to have a family that would answer all my calls for help,” Scott said. “Some of my more favorite moments to plan was getting my extended family



MEGAN AND her mother, Beth before the ceremony.

involved. For example, asking for the Nichols family to cook the rehearsal dinner for us. Seeing them be a part of this day was a special thing to have.”

Dave and Leslie Nichols are long-time family friends of Scott’s family. Dave and Scott’s dad, Don, worked together for a long time at MoDOT in Jefferson City and Scott and

his brother Cody also grew up with their daughter, Ashley. Ashley and husband Cale helped out with the rehearsal dinner as well.

“We are so thankful for their help in preparing food and setting up the dinner while we had our rehearsal at the church,” Megan said.

Scott’s parents and brother were also supportive and happy to step in where they were needed.

“Scott did a great job of helping out wherever he could!” Megan said. “He called most of the businesses, wrote out and stamped invitations.”

An early good-bye

With the big day coming soon, Megan couldn’t help but think of the one person she would miss the most on her wedding day.

“My grandpa (Duane Caldwell) passed away in June of 2018,” Megan said. “He was one person that I really would have loved to be at my wedding.”

Her family felt the loss of his presence as they planned the day, but came up with a way for Megan to keep him close during the ceremony.

A vow reveal

Pastor Stephanie DeLong would be the officiant at St. Peter’s United Church of Christ for the Walker/Hillis wedding ceremony. The couple took their final pre-marriage counseling session with DeLong a week before the wedding.

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THE BRIDE and groom share a kiss in front of the stained glass window at St. Peter's United Church of Christ.

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“She did a great job in helping us prepare for marriage,” Megan said. “During this meeting, we had a few last things to discuss and then we did a run-through of the ceremony. During this time we heard each other’s vows for the first time. We had decided a long time before the wedding that we wanted to write and share our own vows.”

Scott’s vows couldn’t have said more for Megan.

“When I heard Scott’s vows for the first time, Pastor and I instantly started crying. It meant a lot to me to hear what he had to say,” she said. “I can definitely say that I was glad I heard them for the first time in the church alone rather than in front of everyone. I don’t know if I would have been able to pull myself together to say mine during the real thing.”

Scott’s vows:

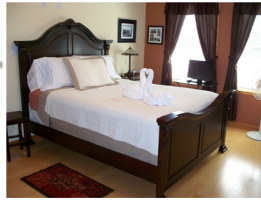
Megan, I promise to always make you feel loved, honor you in every moment of my life and put that smile on your face that brightens my entire day. I promise to be a supportive husband that learns to love everything you passionately care for...even the long good byes that take a few extra minutes or even hours... and show up later than everyone

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THEIR FLOWER girl, Hadley Kay Kills (photo left) gives Megan a kiss on her cheek after the wedding. After the ceremony the bride and groom placed a wreath of flowers on a commemorative brick for her grandfather outside the Gasconade County Historical Society Museum.

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else, even though we are not first. I promise to live a life that promotes our Christian faith and remember that God is our savior, who loves ALL.

Lastly, I want you to know that I am happy to call you my traveling companion, love of my life, partner in Christ, and my best friend.

I hold these vows for the entirety of my life.

Megan's vows:

Scott, I have been hoping and praying for this moment since I was a young girl. It is hard to believe that our wedding day is finally here. Most people say life

never turns out how you imagine. I would say I have to agree. Looking back at my life there are things that I wish never happened. However, meeting you is not one of them. Because of you, I am more loving, more trusting, and more accepting of others. You have changed me for the better and for that I am grateful. I know I don't tell you often enough, but I love you and I am so lucky to have you in my life. I know that marriage won't always be easy. I promise to never give up on us. I promise to take care of myself both mentally and physically. I promise to work on asking for help when I feel unloveable. Here's to many more Friday nights at El Jimador, basketball games, and enjoying life with my best friend. I love you!

Charmed...

Everyone met at St. Peters United Church of Christ in Owensville before the wedding. Her maid of honor and sister, Allison Walker, and bridesmaids Jaimie Blaue, Jennifer Slattery, Whitney Jaegers, Alyssa Angell, Maggie Greenlaw, Ashley Crisp and Jenna Germer helped Megan to get ready in the quilting room.

The day was planned and ready. Old World Creations brought in the flowers. Gann had the decorations ready, Carol's Catering in Owensville took care of the food. Teresa Lynn Cakes in Sullivan brought the cake. Her wedding dress from Ana Marie's Bridal in Jefferson City was displayed and at the ready, along with the bridesmaids' dresses from David's Bridal. Missa Hol-

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landsworth, a Mary Kay consultant located in Gerald arrived to do everyone's make-up, Candi Dietrich from 28th & Main in Owensville was their hairstylist, and nails had been done earlier by Kayla Fisher at Great Reflections in Owensville.

All of the important ladies in her life gathered to help Megan on her special day. It was then that her mother Beth and sister Allison gave her a special gift.

"One of the sweetest moments of my wedding day was the surprise that I found on my bouquet," she said. "There was a charm that contained a picture of my grandma and grandpa. That really meant a lot to me. My mom and sister showing me my bridal bouquet will definitely be a moment I won't ever forget."

Has anyone seen the groom?

While the girls were prepping, Scott, his best man Robert Herman, groomsman and brother Cody Hillis, cousins Matthew Hillis and

A long, short walk...

Before they knew it, the time had come. Megan waited behind a sea of maroon bridesmaids in her wedding gown.

"My dress was nothing like I pictured or pinned," she smiles. I tried on so many dresses before I found 'the one.' It's such a tough decision to make. And an expensive one."

The long, ivory dress had a lot of detail on the beading. It was also light and flowed well, which was perfect for a hot, August day.

With everyone in place and waiting on the music cues, Megan could feel the nervous, excited energy.

"I love music and feel like I can really make or break a ceremony and reception. I wanted to use songs that were unique and beautiful, but simple," Megan said.

Jean Baker was their pianist. When the music started, the wedding party moved.

Josh Caldwell, cousin of the bride, and Ryan McFall, a friend of the groom, ushered her mom,

member were that I was so happy and 'wow,' she looked absolutely stunning," Scott said. "I am pretty sure my groomsmen had bets going if I was going to shed a tear when I saw Megan."

She remembers being happy too.

"There was so much preparation that took place for this moment and it was finally here. The ceremony went perfectly, but way too fast."

The couple recited their written vows, and after DeLong pronounced them Mr. and Mrs. Hillis,

retreated down the aisle to Better Together by Jack Johnson.

"Scott and I got married on August 3, 2019," she said.

Photographer Ciara Rooney — C It Your Way Photography, Owensville, memorialized the day with photos while Ashton Ahring and Anna Moritz — with Ashton Ahring Photography, Owensville video recorded the event.

A celebration.

Following the ceremony, food and cake were waiting at the Lions

Hall in Owensville. Big Treble Entertainment located in Fulton were DJs and announced the wedding party's arrival. They celebrated and danced the night away as Mr. and Mrs. Scott and Megan Hillis.

The honeymoon.

"We went on a week-long honeymoon to Rockaway Beach, Oregon," she said. "I definitely didn't grow up imagining I would end up in Oregon on my honeymoon, but

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"I wish I would have had time to take in the moments more."

Eric Marsch, and other groomsmen Jalen Martin, Jeremy Geist were supposed to be picked up by a bus at the Air BnB they stayed at. The group was supposed to go to lunch and then the church.

As maid of honor, Allison was in charge of keeping track of the groom and his groomsmen.

"While the girls were getting ready, I asked my sister to call Scott and make sure that the bus picked them up and that they had made it to lunch. They hadn't!" Megan said, remembering one of the most frustrating moments of the wedding. "My sister lied to me, saying that everything was working out as planned so that I wouldn't stress out."

They laugh about that now.

"The bus got LOST and was LATE," she said. "How can you get lost in Owensville?"

In the meantime, she and the bridesmaids were treated to an interesting show from a dumpster diver outside the church window, dressed in an amusing outfit!

The groom and groomsmen finally arrived, dressed in their tuxedos from Samuel's Tuxedos in Jefferson City.

and Scott's parents Donald and Marilyn Hillis to their seats while a piano rendition of It's a Wonderful World floated in the air.

Then the melody of Still Deciding was playing and her bridesmaids were on their way up the aisle. Hadley Kay Hillis, the groom's niece, was their flower girl, while Kane Jaegers, the son of a friend of the bride, served as ring bearer. Reece and Olivia DeSimone, friends of the bride, were candle lighters.

Megan and her dad Steven were in the back. When Somewhere Over the Rainbow began playing on the piano, she took his arm as they waited behind an accordion door.

"I was nervous — in a good way!" she said. "I was most worried about walking down the aisle and having everyone looking at me. I stood in the back of the church with my dad for what seemed like forever before I would let them open the (doors). Once it was open though, the nervousness disappeared."

Scott's first look at Megan was perfect.

"Really, the only things I re-



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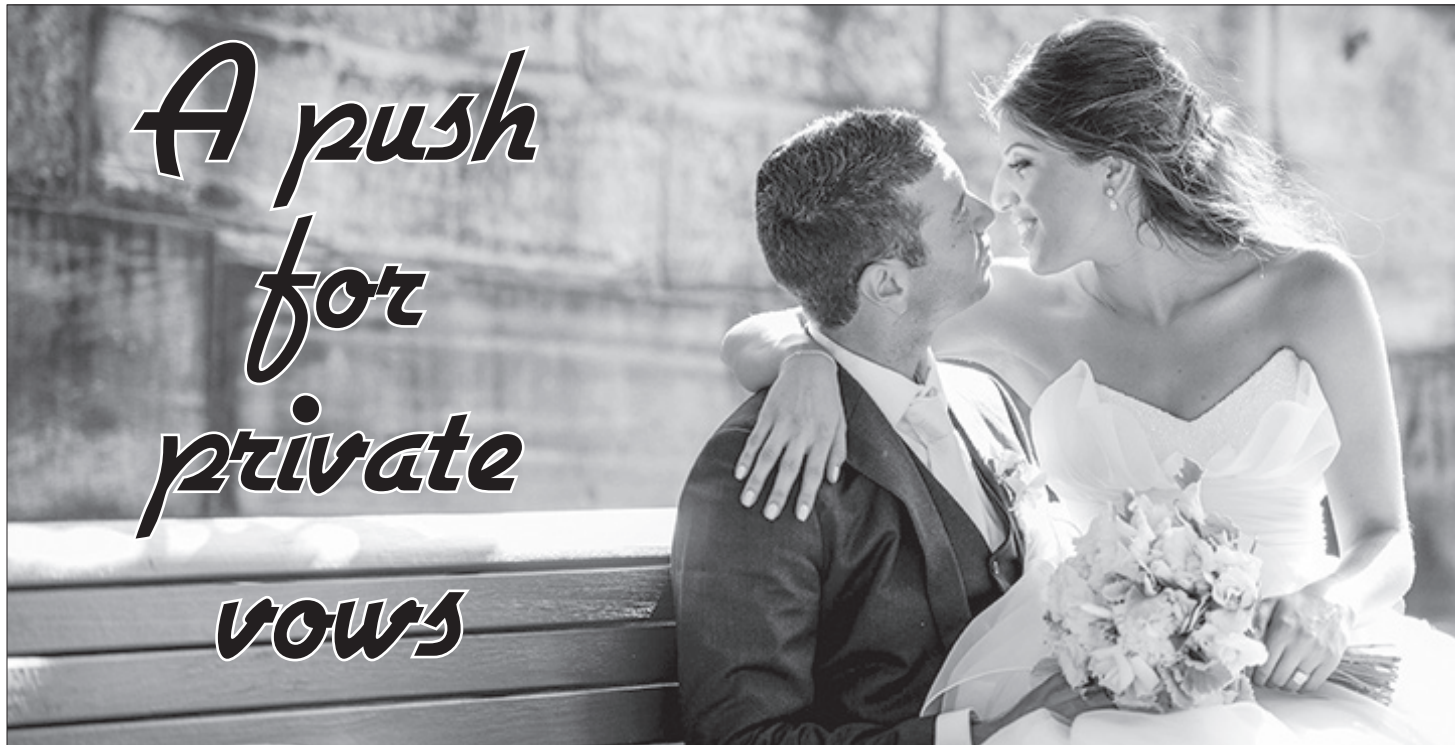
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ceremony itself. A quiet moment alone allows couples to shed private tears and share a special moment before they make haste for the altar.

The Knot, a premier wedding planning resource, notes that there are many reasons to share private vows.

- You do not like being in the spotlight or become shy in front of crowds.
- There are words you would like to share with your future spouse that are deeply private, and you don't want to express those feelings to every person at the wedding.
- You do not want to censor your thoughts or words.
- You desire an intimately private and personal moment together before all of the fanfare and rush of the wedding.
- You'd like to recite loving words in a native language that some guests may not understand.
- You desire the potential for some very great candid photos if you invite the photographer to be there at a distance.
- You want to create a lasting memory that is only yours as a couple to share.

The popularity of private vows exchanged before a wedding ceremony is growing. This growing trend provides yet another way for couples to personalize their weddings.

Weddings are very special occasions for two people who are in love. That's why many couples want close family and friends nearby when they tie the knot. But even the happiest couples may express some nervousness about one particular part of traditional wedding ceremonies.

Wedding vows are a way for couples to profess their love for each other. However, many couples who want to write their own vows are hesitant to say them aloud in front of an audience. If couples are intimidated by a heartfelt recital of their vows in front of a crowd, then exchanging vows in private

may be for them.

Wedding planners and industry experts say that private vows have become very popular. While the vows do not replace the public exchange that seals the marriage from a legal standpoint, they can be words shared in a private moment before the actual

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THE RECEPTION for the Hillis' wedding was held at the Lions Hall in Owensville. The cake was provided by Teresa Lynn Cakes of Sullivan.

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it was SO beautiful, clean and quiet.”
 The location was a compromise for the couple — Megan wanted a beach and Scott wanted the mountains.
 “In Oregon, we had a little bit of both,” Megan said. “We had an Air BnB right on the beach, so we got to watch the sunset and listen to the waves every night, we walked on the beach, got to see so many cool animals in tidepools, take a train ride along the coast, and so much more. It was a perfect week together.”

Full circle...

Scott and Megan have now come full circle. Married for a little over six months, the couple returned to Jefferson City and to teaching.

“We are both teachers for the Jefferson City School District,” she said. “I teach fourth grade at Belair Elementary and Scott

teachers special education at Thomas Jefferson Middle School. Scott is also a basketball coach for Capital City High School.”

Looking back.

“As teachers, Scott and I had a goal to plan, wed, and honeymoon all before our school year started,” Megan said. “It worked out perfectly and was less stressful since the wedding could be our only focus.”

But the day went fast.
 “Everyone says the day goes by so fast! I never believed it, but the time did fly!” Megan said. “I wish I would have had time to take in the moments more.”

With so many people to talk to, the couple just didn't make it to everyone.

“I wish I would have had more time to visit with each person individually and thank them for coming to celebrate with us,” she said.



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How to plan a wedding ceremony

Months of planning is par for the course for couples about to tie the knot. Much of that planning concerns the reception, and rightfully so. Receptions last longer than ceremonies, and couples are often involved in every reception detail, from picking the appetizers to serve during cocktail hour to choosing the final song before everyone calls it a night. But it's equally important that couples devote considerable attention to their wedding ceremonies.

A wedding ceremony might not last long, but it is the most crucial component of a couple's wedding day and can even set the tone for the rest of the festivities. From choosing readings to honoring loved ones to immersing oneself in his or her faith, these tips can help couples plan their perfect ceremony.

- Give the ceremony equal footing with the reception. Spend time trying to put a personalized spin on the proceedings, whether that entails writing your own vows or choosing moving music that means something to you. When given ample attention, seemingly minor details can make for a special, memorable ceremony.

- Choose a ceremony location that is close to the reception site. If a ceremony will take place in a house of worship, try to choose a reception venue close to the ceremony site. This keeps guests, some of whom may be out-of-towners who have already traveled extensively,

See **Ceremony**, Page 13B



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Plan to treat guests in extra-special ways

Weddings may focus on the couples getting hitched, but weddings also are special thanks to the many family and friends couples involve in the festivities. Some of the more successful weddings are ones in which couples honor their guests and let them know how much they're appreciated. By incorporating these ideas into their wedding ceremonies and receptions, couples can let their guests know how much they're loved.

- Arrange seats at the ceremony (if practical) in a circular pattern around you so that everyone can have a great view when you exchange vows.
- Create a bathroom convenience basket for both the men's and women's bathrooms. Stock items that might come in handy, like mouthwash, toothpaste, first aid items, spare pantyhose, hair spray, sanitary products, moisturizer, gum, and whatever other niceties you can think of.
- Provide prearranged to-go boxes so that guests can take home tasty tidbits from the meal or dessert table.
- Offer transportation between the ceremony and reception.
- Customize "do not disturb" door tags for overnight guests so they can ensure they get enough shut-eye after partying into the wee hours of the morning.
- Make sure the photographer takes photos of everyone at every table and then share those photos on a wedding website or via social media. Create a hashtag unique to your wedding so that guests can easily find the photos.
- Provide inexpensive slippers or flip-flops so that avid dancers can rest their toes in between songs.
- If valet parking service is not included, ask for an add-on so that guests get door-to-door treatment.
- Always be considerate of special needs by seating guests in places where they're most likely to be comfortable. Keep elderly guests away from speakers and near exits to facilitate trips to the bathroom.
- Be mindful of all food allergies or requirements and have accommodations set up in advance.
- Honor those people who could not be at the wedding in a special way, including deceased family and friends.
- Include information about how guests can request songs at the reception. Pass on the information to the band or DJ.
- Encourage guests to get up and dance by making it fun. Put song lyrics from different songs on each table. When that song is played, that table has to join you on the dance floor.
- Remember to thank everyone for coming and follow up those in-person sentiments with handwritten, personalized thank-you notes after the wedding.

Ceremony • from page 12B

from spending too much time on the road during the day of the wedding.

- Get to know the officiant. The officiant should be someone with whom you both feel comfortable. This person should know you well enough that he or she can preside over the ceremony and add sentiments that come across as authentic and personalized.
 - Do your best to avoid especially lengthy ceremonies. Couples will need to meet the religious requirements if they are getting married in the faith, and there may be some aspects of the ceremony that you cannot cut short or modify. But if you have wiggle room, try to keep the ceremony to around 30 minutes; otherwise, you run the risk of guests getting antsy, especially if children are in the audience.
 - Decorate the ceremony space. While the altar and aisle are key places to draw attention, couples also can dress up the chairs/pews, ceiling (if allowed), and entrance to the space to make it welcoming and romantic.
- Even wedding ceremonies that likely won't run long can benefit from some pre-wedding planning.

Did you know?

December may not mark the peak of wedding season, but many couples tie the knot at the culmination of the holiday season. According to The Knot, a leading wedding industry resource and information site, New Year's Eve weddings are popular. A poll from The Knot found that 7,230 weddings were scheduled for December 31, 2017. Flowing champagne, extra vacation days during the holidays and long weekends, as well as the merry atmosphere of the holiday season can make New Year's Eve a great time to get hitched.



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Still the one — 77 years later

BY ROXIE MURPHY
REPUBLICAN FEATURE WRITER

Norman Dempsey Jones and wife Naomi celebrated 77 years together on Feb. 3 at Victorian Place in Owensville.

The 96 and 95-year-old couple, respectively, met in Meta during their high school years.

“Dad was a barber,” Naomi recalled. “We moved to Dixon when he went to work for another barber, and we met in our third year of high school.”

The couple were in the same grade and shared a class or two.

“We started going together,” she said. “I knew he was going to be it, I just didn’t know how he’d feel about it.”

“I thought, ‘what a good looking girl,’” Norman said.

Norman, known to most in Owensville as Norman Dempsey to differentiate between himself and another resident at Victorian Place, said he worked in Fort Leonard Wood during his high school years, while Naomi was a waitress at PX. But World War II had been going on for nearly four years already, and Norman felt he needed to be of service

See **Jones**, Page 15B

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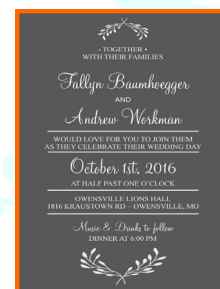
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Jett • from page 14B

to his country.

"We decided to get married on Feb. 3, 1943," Norman said. He was 19-years-old, she was 18-years-old. "We went to Vienna to get a marriage license. The judge wanted to know if I wanted to get married."

Judge Fred Helton was serving the courtroom at the time.

"I said 'yeah, right away, 'cause I'm going into the service,'" Norman remembers.

Helton called every employee in the courthouse to his office and married the couple right then. Naomi, who usually wore clothes made by her mother, had purchased a blue dress for the occasion. Norman wore his military uniform.

"I was going to go to my uncle, who was a preacher, but they wanted to marry us," he said. "They didn't charge us for the service, and within a week, I went to the service."

Elopements were common for the time and usually resulted in a combination bridal wedding shower called a charivari.

"They gave me a charivari back home in Dixon," Naomi said.

Naomi stayed with her parents and Norman was sent to Wichita Falls, Texas, to an Air Force base. After basic training, Norman was stationed in Illinois, and sent for Naomi.

"I asked her to come for a visit, and she came to stay," Norman laughed.

"I got a job on base the first day," Naomi agreed with a smile.

It wasn't long before Norman was stationed overseas, first stop Napples, Italy.



"I was afraid he wouldn't come back," Naomi said. "I got pregnant right away, and he knew before he left."

Norman was stationed in Europe for nearly two years. Their first child Janet Sue Jones was born in his absence.

"She was five days short of a year-old before he saw her," Naomi said.

During his absence, Naomi and baby Janet lived with her parents, Ulysses and Nellie Pendleton, in Belle. Ulysses had purchased a barbershop there.

"My parents made sure I was taken care of," Naomi said.

The couple had written to each other every day, sometimes twice a day. Naomi said it was common to write two letters, each basically containing the same content, and send them by different types of mail.

Nearly 18 months after Norman left Missouri, the war ended. Naomi and her family picked Norman up at the Rolla Airport and took him home to Belle. They lived in the back rooms of the barbershop her father ran during the day.

Norman went to work for Bledsoe Mining Co. for a while, then the couple eventually worked for Brown Shoe Company in Owensville, traveling back and forth from Belle.

"Our son, Craig, was born March 8, 1947, we were already working at Brown Shoe then," Naomi said. "He lives in Landwehr Subdivision now with his two children. Janet has three children," Naomi said proudly.

If the couple could do it again, they'd still be together, but maybe they would have done a few things differently.

"I think I would have taken different jobs, but I would have the same family," Norman said.

"I don't regret anything," Naomi smiled.

They were happy to share their secret of a long and happy marriage.

"On taking care of the other," Norman began. "And never say you can't do anything. If you want to bad enough, you can."

"Sounds good to me!" Naomi said. "That applies to both of us."

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Wedding planning tips and tricks

Recently engaged couples are often so swept up in the excitement surrounding their engagements that they can be forgiven for initially overlooking all the wedding planning that awaits them. Planning a wedding is no small task, but many couples very much enjoy all the hard work that goes into making their special day a success.

It's hard for newly engaged couples who have never before planned a wedding to know what awaits them. But the following tips can help make the wedding planning process go smoothly.

- Find your organization method. Organization is the key to pulling off the wedding of your dreams. Whether your organizational style is best served by jotting details like dates and deposit deadlines down in a notebook or utilizing an online spreadsheet or smartphone app, choose your method early on. Keeping information and reminders in one place can make it easier to manage all the tasks that lie ahead.

- Take your time. There's no rush to the altar. Feel free to extend the engagement long

enough to keep stress levels down and get the location and ceremony of your dreams. Many recently engaged couples feel pressured to get married right away. Stretching out the engagement to save money or give yourself more time to plan can make for a wonderful wedding day.

- Discuss the budget openly and honestly. Did you know a New York City wedding can cost \$77,000, according to Money magazine? Wedding costs can vary widely, and couples should sit down together to decide what they can afford and are willing to pay for.

- Decide on a guest list. Planning decisions are often based around the projected number of guests. You'll need to have a ballpark figure regarding guests before you can choose a venue and make other decisions, such as where guests will stay. And if the majority of guests are coming from a certain area, such as your hometown, you may want to bring the wedding to them instead of asking them to come to you.

- Create a priorities list. Make a list of at



least three things that are most important for each of you. It may be the ceremony location, the food or another factor. Knowing what is important can help you negotiate prices and understand what to look for when planning.

These are some of the considerations

couples should make while planning their weddings. While it's important to consider these factors and others, it's also important that couples have fun when planning their nuptials.



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More couples are embracing edgy, adventurous weddings



Brides and grooms once felt compelled to conform to the trappings of traditional weddings. From uber-romantic vows to pastel colors to the penultimate white tiered cake, various wedding components were long considered must-haves. But modern couples are increasingly expressing their individuality, and even embracing more edgy and adventurous elements, when planning their weddings.

According to The Knot, a leading bridal resource and information site, today's weddings are not what they were just a few years ago. Bold colors, exotic cakes and nontraditional foliage, are just some of the elements modern couples are embracing to set their weddings apart.

Adventurous locales

Vineyards and catering halls can be great places to tie the knot, but couples who like to push the envelope are looking to more adventurous locales to impart their unique spin on their weddings. Sharing vows atop a mountain crest at the end of a favorite hiking trail or on a roller coaster at a theme park that harkens back to a first date are some adventurous places to tie the knot.

Outside-the-box menus

Couples may want to break with tradition

by offering a wide selection of foods at their receptions. These foods can include items that fit with their specific ethnic cuisines, gourmet comfort foods (think cocktail franks wellington), or foods that fit with their dietary choices, such as organic or vegan options.

Bold wardrobe choices

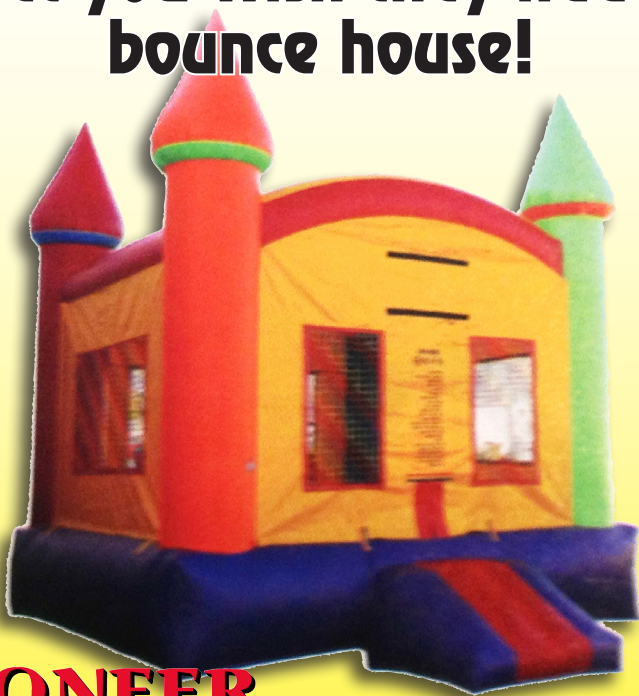
Brides can put new spins on their gowns by adding color and texture. Sequins, bold embroidery, shorter hemlines, and whatever adventurous fashion style you want to impart can be considered. If white isn't your thing, that's okay, too. Yellow and slate gray look great together. Gentlemen can choose to wear a black suit or any combination of color and style they want to make a dramatic impression.

Full of flavor

Cakes don't have to be white with white buttercream. In fact, couples can make things even more tasty by incorporating favorite flavor combinations into their cakes. For example, a chocolate and caramel filling reminiscent of a candy bar might be something to consider.

Modern couples are embracing bold, unique and edgy components when planning their weddings. Putting an individualized spin on the ceremony and reception can make couples even more excited to tie the knot.

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Get the most out of bridal shows and wedding events

Recently engaged couples may be excited to get a jump on wedding planning. Bridal shows can be a great way for couples to meet and familiarize themselves with local wedding professionals, all the while introducing themselves to the terminology of wedding planning.

Though they're a great source of information, contacts and samples, bridal shows also can be a bit overwhelming. Learning how to maximize time spent at shows can help couples plan their weddings as efficiently as possible.

- Start small. If the idea of large crowds is unappealing, attend the more intimate, boutique shows that are often held at local reception halls and restaurants instead of the larger installations at convention centers and hotels.

- Scout out vendors. Check the bridal show's website for lists of exhibitors and see if your desired vendors are on the list. But even if they're not, keep an open mind and use the show as a chance to compare offerings. If an event map is available, marking off must-visit booths can help save time.

- Pre-register. Pre-registering for bridal events saves time at check-in, and doing so may make you eligible for discounted tickets.

- Come prepared. Chances are each vendor is going to ask couples for information so that they can follow up with a phone call or email with more detailed offerings and estimates. Couples attending the show can expedite the process by coming equipped with labels that feature their names, contact information and wedding date. They can then stick the labels on sign-in sheets or use them like business cards.

- Dress comfortably. Bridal expos involve a lot of walking and roaming around. Wear comfortable clothing and shoes. Consider a backpack or hands-free bag so you are not weighed down when collecting the swag and other handouts throughout the day.

- Ask questions. When face-to-face with vendors, rely on their expertise but don't hesitate to ask questions concerning themes, colors, recommendations for honeymoon locations, invitation paper suggestions, and much more.

- Stay for the fashion show. Many shows will offer a runway experience to present the latest gown and tuxedo offerings. This can be an entertaining way for couples to formulate their wedding styles.

Wedding shows introduce couples to vendors and set them on the path to making decisions regarding the planning of their weddings.

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COUPLES ARE moving away from traditional centerpieces to floral chandeliers and curtains made of blooms for their weddings.

Wedding flowers becoming larger than life

Move over bouquets and centerpieces. Flowers are taking over weddings in a big way. While wedding trends come and go, flowers will always have a place at the wedding table.

The blooms brides and grooms choose and how they decide to display them can say much about the couple's style. Many modern couples are opting for statement pieces with their flowers to rival the big and bold ideas they're incorporating elsewhere into their occasions, such as in cakes and clothing. In fact, floral designer Tom Uberuaga says traditional hurricane vase centerpieces are outdated and only focus the eye on the middle of the table. He prefers guests enter the wedding and have their senses stimulated by flowers from all angles. Large flower installations, as well as blooms popping up in unexpected places, are some of the hot trends for couples to keep their eyes on.

Floral chandeliers

There's no need to worry about seeing over table centerpieces or flowers getting in the way of photo moments. Thanks to hanging flowers and floral chandeliers, flowers are quite literally moving up in the world. Hanging floral pieces can add instant drama and make a large visual impact. Florists can hang flowers from beams over tabletops to increase visual impact, whether as individual baskets, single stems or floral swags. Hanging floral chandeliers are dramatic but naturally expensive. Think about a large installation that forces guests to look up into a sea of greenery and flowers. The smell and the sight can be breathtaking.

Welcome wreaths

Why should wreaths only be reserved for front doors and holiday decor? A welcome floral wreath can be placed by the entryway to a chapel or reception hall with a heartfelt sentiment that shows guests how much they're appreciated.

Fairy-tale flowers

A floral curtain of hanging flowers can line a chuppah or drape the altar in beautiful blooms. Couples who would like a fairy-tale entrance also can make their debut as a couple by coming through a flower curtain at the reception. Martha Stewart Weddings says a cascade of flowers and greens can be romantic and elegant.

Dance floor blooms

Who says flowers have to be overhead or on a table? With a plexiglass dance floor, or one made from some other transparent material, flowers can be underfoot, creating a magical floral carpet.

Floral necklaces

Brides needn't carry their bouquets, they can wear ethereal and whimsical floral pieces around their necks or on their waists instead.

Couples are urged to speak with their florists about the innovative ways they can make flowers an even more awe-inspiring component of their weddings.

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The evolution of wedding favors

Wedding favors have changed — and in many cases for the better. Favors have evolved from the inexpensive trinkets purchased in bulk into more personalized mementos that guests can cherish.

Today's couples are interested in customizing their weddings and offering guests something meaningful, or at the very least, edible, so that favors don't immediately get relegated to the trash can. According to Heather Jones of Wente Vineyards in California, favors have moved from "goodie bags" toward items that are experimental and fun. Wedding planners from across the country offer these wedding favor trends that couples may want to incorporate into their own celebrations.

Welcome bags

Rather than take-home bags, welcome bags have replaced the traditional favor trinket at some weddings. Many weddings have become multi-day events that ask guests traveling from out of town to attend a wedding weekend. To help greet them and make their experience memorable, couples may fill a gift bag with items guests can use

or enjoy during their stay — like a bottle of locally sourced maple syrup or some handmade soaps from a nearby shopkeeper.

Experience gifts

Instead of a candle or a monogrammed cake server, think of experiences to offer guests. A coupon for free drinks at a nearby brewery, a tour of a local attraction while guests are in town or a group excursion for guests attending a destination wedding can be fun and will help guests create lasting memories.

Charitable donations

Some couples feel that favors are wasteful and would rather set aside a portion of their wedding budgets toward giving back. In such situations, a donation to charity in guests' names can be the way to go. Guests can vote on two favorite charities advertised on a special table at the wedding reception. The one with the most votes will get the proceeds.

Late-night snacks

After a night of celebrating, some guests may want the festivities to continue, but may need some extra sustenance to make it through a few more hours. Some couples



are eschewing traditional favors in lieu of making room for extra food or beverage expenses that can include after-party treats. These may run the gamut from wood-fired pizzas to food truck vendors to extra desserts. A tasty take-home option also may be given, such as fresh zeppolis or beignets, or

even a personalized bottle of wine. Even if the food and drink is not consumed right away, there's a good chance it will hit the spot when guests return to their hotel rooms.

Wedding favors are changing to keep up with the times and keep guests feeling extra special.

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Make a statement with your wedding cake



Brides and grooms may pour over every detail of their weddings, but few components of the festivities may be as fun, especially for foodies, as deciding what the wedding cake will look like. Couples who want to deliver show-stopping visuals often express some measure of their creativity and personalities through statement wedding cakes.

Many couples now eschew the classic three-tiered white cake in favor of a dessert that garners instant attention. Whether the cake is brightly colored or hand-painted, a towering architectural marvel or shimmering in metallics, couples are opting to make a statement with their confections. Apart from clever cake-toppers, here are ways to stand apart when dessert is served.

- According to the Perfect Wedding Guide, a rising trend in cakes is to cover a white or naked cake with translucent glaze tinted in the couple's wedding colors. This artistic expression can be especially stunning in boho-chic weddings.

- Statement tiers also are popular. The cake may be traditional in nearly every way, but couples then set the cake apart by featuring an elaborate design or a different hue in one tier.

- Martha Stewart Weddings advises that more than just color can be used to make a statement. Lifelike

sugar flowers can really set cakes apart. Guests may not be sure if they can consume all aspects of some cakes. But delicate sugar flowers taste as good as they look.

- Hand-painted tiles on a cake are another way to add panache. A bride and groom may be inspired by a European vacation or the stained-glass effects of religious windows and want to add that feel to the tiers of the cake.

- Sometimes a statement comes by way of texture. Even an all-white cake can be dressed up with interesting textural effects. Ruffles, lace, embossing, and 3-D rosettes are different textural components that can be incorporated in cake designs.

- Couples also may want to tell their unique stories with cake. Individual tiers designed to reflect various milestone moments from the couple's relationship can be quite engaging.

- Capitalizing on the trend of edgier weddings, couples may opt for darker hues on their cakes — even a black tier — or nontraditional geometric shapes to the cake itself or its design elements.

Statement cakes can really say something about the couple getting married. Much like other wedding elements, cakes provide a window into the minds of happy couples.

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MY SIDE

A wedding comparison

Weddings and the preparation for getting married have certainly changed over the years. When Dennis and I were married in June of 1986, some things we just took for granted.

For instance, we knew we would get married in my church in Cuba — Holy Cross Catholic Church. I knew that I would wear a long white dress with lace and frills. For the reception dinner we were going to have mostaccioli, roast beef, green beans, salad and garlic bread for the and that we were not going to live together before we got married.

Nowadays, for many couples, things are different.

First of all, I feel that with the emergence of social media, Pinterest, and the ease of online shopping, many newly engaged couples have in some ways an easier time of planning the big day and in other ways a much more difficult time. Perhaps I am wrong, but I feel that by posting details and such of your big day, you almost have to “try to one up” other couples.

Most of us are aware that some people present a very perfect scenario of their lives on Facebook and such. I feel that couples



by **CONNIE WARDEN**

almost have to “keep up” with everyone else posting the beautiful pictures and the unique settings. Many weddings, and the gatherings leading up to them, have themes and I would imagine many hours are spent trying to plan a perfect event.

Fewer weddings take place in a church than they did 30 years ago. I know neither of our sons and daughters-in-law took their vows in a church. Ethan and Hillary were married at White Mule Winery and Jacob and Jess exchanged vows at Lost Valley Resort. Don't get me wrong, both ceremonies were touching and very nice — they just weren't held in a church. We have a niece who is planning a wedding this summer. Her dream location is in a hayfield on her family farm.

Indeed, to each their own. You can find an array of different wedding dresses now. And in different colors — there's blush, oyster, champagne, gray, pink, blue — even vivid blue. An online search even yielded a black wedding dress. Some of the dresses I saw online certainly don't look like what I envision when I think wedding dresses.

Jerry Voss and I were talking the other day about a dress she saw in the window of Ana Maries in Jefferson City that was very short in the front and then long in the back. This definitely goes to prove that styles change.

I've also heard of newly married couples enjoying a pizza bar at their reception, or a tacobar. If they have the funds, they can serve an extremely fancy meal for their guests.

We had the ladies of the church in Owensville, Immaculate Conception, fix the meal for us. Since the reception was held in Owensville at the VFW hall, it just made sense for the meal to be prepared in Owensville. I don't remember even thinking twice about the menu — we just served what practically everyone else served around the area — the old standbys of mostaccioli and

roast beef. Life was simple. Dennis and I also didn't live together before we said “I do”. All three of our children have taken up residence with their loved one before the big day. Although some folks do not live together before marriage, I feel that a great number do. Please understand — I am not being judgmental here. Living together may be a good way to get to know a person and all of their good and bad habits. We chose to figure all of that stuff out after we got married.

Actually we got to know each other through spending time together on the weekends — he lived in Hannibal and I was going to school in Columbia, and through letter writing and our once a week phone call at 11 p.m. on Wednesday evening. We waited until 11 p.m. because that is when the long distance rates went down.

We did not snap chat, text, video chat, message each other on Facebook or use Instagram. We actually had to talk to each other or put our feelings down on paper. That's kind of awesome because we still have some

See **Comparison**, Page 23B

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DENNIS AND CONNIE WARDEN wedding, June 7, 1986

Comparison • from page 22B

of those letters — unlike Snapchats which disappear. A few years ago I ran across a puzzle that I had created for Dennis. I had taken a poster board and wrote my message to him on the front side and then cut it apart into about 12 puzzle pieces. On the back of the pieces I wrote either the lyrics of a love song or a letter to him. Then I mailed the pieces to him one at a time. It was fun!

Our daughter and her boyfriend have yet to become engaged — but we feel it is inevitable. He is a very nice young man and he fits very well in our family. We love Alex. They will have a lot of decisions

to make. Where geographically should they get married? Big wedding or small? Destination wedding? Long dress or short — or some other attire entirely? In church or somewhere else? Who will perform the ceremony? I really don't envy them — the number of decisions can be overwhelming.

Here is what it all boils down to, though....love each other through thick and through thin. Complete each other and support each other.

Remember to take time each day and listen to each other. Say I love you every day. In the end it doesn't really matter what your wedding was like. It's what you do with the vows you took on that day that matters.

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