

# Stress relief

Wedding planners can take load off bride's shoulders



Wedding planner Melinda Duncan talked with soon-to-be-married Rachel Egge of Fall Creek and Robert Judson of Eau Claire during a recent consultation at Duncan's Altoona home office.

By Heather Rothbauer-Wanish

It finally happened — you're engaged! You've dreamed of marrying your one true love your entire life and the time is here. Your special day should be carefree, relaxing and memorable, right?

Before you walk down that aisle, there are just a few things to consider. When will the wedding occur? Are you getting married at a church or outdoors? Where is the reception? What type of food will you want on that important day? Do you want lilies or roses in your bouquet? How many attendants? Do you want someone to sing at the wedding or would you prefer an instrumental quartet? Would you prefer chocolate or white cake? Where will you find the perfect decorations? Your carefree, simple wedding suddenly seems a lot more complicated.

If you feel overwhelmed and underconfident in the wedding

planning department, a wedding planner may be the person to contact. A wedding planner, also known as a bridal consultant, can assist couples in planning their entire wedding or certain aspects of the wedding, depending upon the wishes of the couple.

For some brides and grooms, it helps to have someone organizing and working with vendors. Melinda Duncan, an Eau Claire-based bridal consultant, has a wedding planning company called The Wedding Genie. She says that organization is the key to her successful wedding planning.

As the Wedding Genie, Duncan meets with potential clients in-person to discuss the wedding and explain her services. Individuality is the key for Duncan and her clients.

"I have a checklist for people that can be individualized for each couple," Duncan said. Each wedding is different and must be treated as a

unique event. Some couples prefer to plan certain portions of the day and allow the bridal consultant to plan other details.

Whatever is decided, Duncan expresses the importance of doing what's best for the client.

"People should have the option of enjoying a stress-free day," Duncan said.

Mary Charmoli, co-owner of Saratoga Weddings in Siren has been helping engaged couples plan their ideal weddings since January 1993. According to Charmoli, "I had been designing wedding flowers, and my business partner had worked at a gown shop in the past. We were discussing what we could do together in the field and realized that we were already advising couples about wedding planning, so we decided to get more education, and the rest is history."

Education for Charmoli and her

business partner came in the form of classes with the Association of Bridal Consultants. Now, several years later, she is the ABC-Wisconsin state coordinator.

By hiring a consultant from the Association of Bridal Consultants, you have a person who has met educational and experience criteria for advancement, Charmoli said.

"Each year, with renewal, the member is required to submit his or her educational credits," she said.

Catharine Han, a bridal consultant with Your Dream Wedding and Events, said, "Many couples today look for quality, so finding a planner through the Association of Bridal Consultants is a great way to find wedding planners who are professional, and couples will know that they are getting the best."

As a certified bridal consultant through the Association of Bridal Consultants, Duncan looks forward to continuing her education in the future. In fact, she is planning to achieve additional certifications to expand her business.

Each bridal consultant's business is a bit different. For example, Saratoga Weddings is a full-time business for Charmoli and her business partner. For Duncan, her Wedding Genie business is a part-time endeavor. Marketing her business through word-of-mouth and very little advertising, Duncan is steadily growing her client list. As her clientele expands, she is hoping to dedicate herself full time to her wedding planning business in the future.

Part of business growth for a wedding planner is finding engaged couples who are willing to invest in the actual wedding planning itself. How do local bridal consultants overcome the myth that hiring a bridal consultant or wedding planner is only for the wealthy?

"It is very challenging to get past the idea that consultants are only for the elite," Duncan said. An engaged couple must remember

the value of the time they are saving by having a consultant plan their wedding. She adds that a bridal consultant may not be as expensive as people think.

Charmoli adds, "Yes, there is definitely a misconception about only the wealthy being able to hire a consultant. The smallest wedding can really use the benefits of a consultant because they need to be so careful with their budget and must be creative with their ideas to stretch their dollars."

A bridal consultant can help a busy couple with the organization and detail planning for their special day. Couples should place a value on their time and decide if they are willing to spend their time planning the event or would rather hire someone to undertake the details.

"Experienced consultants know venues and vendors well and can direct you to those who are the best fit for your needs and your budget, saving you time and worry," Charmoli said.

Money is typically a primary concern for engaged couples. Bridal consultants can work within your budget and spend your dollars wisely. Although a consultant may not save you money, he or she can save couples from making costly mistakes and wasting money on needless purchases.

In addition to recommending reputable vendors, the consultant will communicate with the vendors and ensure they know the date, times and places for the wedding day. Although bridal consultants will suggest vendors they may have used in the past, final vendor decisions remain with the engaged couple.

One local woman, Tara Anthony, and her husband, Jim, were married in February 2008 and utilized the services of Saratoga Weddings. Anthony initially contacted Charmoli and met with her to discuss her wedding day. The meeting served as a way for Anthony and Charmoli to become acquainted; it also served as an interview process for both parties. An important factor when hiring a consultant is making sure that both the bridal consultant and couple are comfortable with each other.

Many bridal consultants are willing to take on as much or as little of the planning as necessary.

Anthony highly recommended her experience with Saratoga Weddings.

"Mary asked me what I wanted and was there to guide me, but I still wanted to be involved with the planning," she said.

Although she was involved with some things, she adds that Charmoli was able to take much of the burden.

"My fiancé and I took a trip to Europe immediately before our wedding and we didn't worry about anything," Anthony said. "I had no stress prior to our wedding."

She credits much of that carefree feeling to hiring a consultant to take care of the details.

"A couple should contact a bridal consultant as soon as they get engaged so the couple and the bridal consultant can be on the same page from the start," Han said.

After you are engaged and if you decide to work with a bridal consultant, you may want to follow this general timeline:

- \* Prior to meeting with the consultant — With your partner, discuss your priorities, budgets and parents' contributions.

- \* Initial consultation — Serves as an interview for both parties and will be an information gathering session; an estimate will be provided after this meeting.

- \* Subsequent meetings — These can vary depending upon the individual wedding and bridal consultant; may include coordination of vendors and e-mail/telephone contact with the consultant.

- \* Approximately two weeks prior to the wedding — Final meeting with consultant to verify guest count and timelines on the wedding day.

- \* Wedding day — Bridal consultant presents coordinating details, according to the needs of the couple.

Each wedding is a unique occasion and requires a great deal of planning. A bridal consultant may help alleviate some of the stressors that can accompany that special day. There are many reasons to consider a bridal consultant.

Perhaps, most importantly, as Charmoli said, "A bridal consultant can take care of all of those details in the background because he or she knows what is going on ... leaving the bride free to enjoy the day."

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# Customized wedding

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first dance at the reception doesn't have to be a sappy love song. Choose an up-tempo number or your favorite rock hit. It's a celebration after all. Some guests' jaws may drop initially, but soon they'll understand you're just expressing creative license.

## Personalize stationery

Couples can show their personalities through the stationery they choose — from quirky save-the-date fridge magnets to thank you notes that all form a cohesive theme. A well-designed invitation set not only establishes the mood of the event, it also informs guests of what to do and when. But traditional stationery doesn't offer many opportunities for personalization, especially if you're planning a wedding that has unique communication needs, such as a destination wedding. Checkerboard Ltd. has a line of wedding stationery called Blue Moon that opens up the possibilities for customization. It provides all the elements couples need to communicate with their guests when they are planning destination weddings or have special requirements for which stationery needs to be more than just a response card and ceremony announcement. For example, Blue Moon sets include save-the-date cards, invitations to special activities, schedule of events, stickers for local maps and guidebooks, tags for gift bags, maps, directions cards, welcome letters, programs and custom folders to keep all these documents together. Styles include tropical, al fresco and island botanical themes, beautiful alpine imagery and seasonal designs. Most invitations

can be customized for almost any destination, whether it's overseas or the next town over. Learn more at [www.checkernet.com](http://www.checkernet.com).

## Take the cake

Instead of a tiered wedding cake go for a custom creation. If you've ever tuned into the Food Network you know that cakes can be designed in all shapes and sizes. Or maybe you prefer something even more unique. Whether a series of individual cupcakes, gourmet brownies or your favorite pie, allow your preferences to set the scene instead of feeling the need to conform.

## Free DIY favors

Guests look forward to taking home a memento from the wedding. But usually it's just something that ends up collecting dust on a shelf. Who likes those Jordan almonds anyway? For intimate weddings, such as destination wedding affairs where the guest list may



be considerably smaller, you can personalize favors for each couple that attends the event. Offer a sweet sentiment and words of thanks for their attendance. Blue Moon has a series of matching wedding favors that you can print out for free on a home computer and assemble yourself at [www.checkernet.com/favors](http://www.checkernet.com/favors). From playing card packages to CD holders to flower favor boxes, you can calm stress with some wedding-themed origami and present something truly unique that won't be a budget-breaker.

Think unique and whimsical for your wedding and definitely stand out from the crowd. It's your special day so make the most of it and enjoy and remember the day forever.