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The People-Sentinel

The Wedding PLANNER

A local guide to getting married



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Weddings

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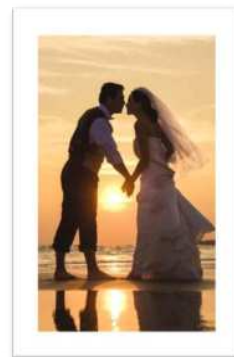
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Did You KNOW?



A number of variables affect how much engaged couples will spend on their weddings. Personal preferences, location and the season in which couples get married are just some of the factors that can affect the final cost of a wedding. However, one aspect couples can count on regarding wedding spending is the reception will likely require the most significant financial investment. The Knot 2022 Real Weddings Study found that

the average cost of a wedding in 2022 was \$30,000.

The study also found that the biggest investment couples make is the venue. Couples indicated they spent

about 37 percent of their overall budget on a wedding venue.

Though some couples may spend more than that and others may spend less, engaged couples currently planning their weddings should know that the cost of the venue where they will tie the knot will likely end up requiring the most significant investment of any component related to their wedding.



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Brandy & David Dodds: Weddings should be a 'celebration of your love and commitment to each other'

Jonathan Vickery

Publisher

Brandy Sanderlin Dodds and her husband David have been inseparable since meeting.

Brandy grew up in Williston and graduated from Blackville-Hilda High School. She attended college and later law school at the University of South Carolina. She is an assistant solicitor for the Second Judicial Circuit in Aiken.

Born and raised in Burlington, Iowa, David graduated from the University of Northern Iowa and served two tours in Iraq with the U.S. Marine Corps Infantry. Afterwards, he moved to Aiken County and now works as a Special Response Team Instructor at the Savannah River Site. He has a 9-year-old daughter.

Instant Connection

Their paths crossed on December 30, 2021.

Brandy was leaving work that day when a co-worker persuaded her to go to a friend's house to watch the USC Gamecocks play their bowl game. There she was introduced to David.

"We immediately hit it off--realizing we had shared interests and backgrounds in psychology and education. David was having friends from that gathering over for an oyster roast the next day to celebrate the New Year, and he extended an invitation to me. The rest, as they say, is history," said Brandy.

A few days after they met, they had some time alone to talk.

"I started to cry as I told him about my grandmother who had recently passed away. In that moment, as he wiped my tears away, I learned that this tough, tattooed and bearded Marine was also extremely gentle and kind. That realization about who he was made me fall in love with him," said Brandy.

"We had an immediate and mostly unspoken acknowledgement that we found the other half of ourselves. We knew that the other was the person we needed and that our ideals of life were identical and what we'd both move our future towards," said David.



The American flag was on full display in this engagement photo for Brandy and David Dodds. It's a nod to David's military service.

This conversation proved to be one that solidified their love for one another.

The Proposal

On Nov. 25, 2022, David took Brandy to her favorite place - a beach in North Carolina.

"The whole trip up, David made comments about how we should go shell-hunting for his daughter (Abigail) at the point when we arrived. When we made it to the beach, I was down at the water's edge, looking for shells and cleaning them off in the cold water, while David was walking further up the beach seemingly uninterested," she said.

As they walked hand-in-hand to the truck, "David said, 'You know I didn't bring you



Brandy and David Dodds exchange vows on May 27, 2023 in Appling, Ga. in front of friends and family.

out here just to look for shells, right?' Then, he got down on one knee, took the ring box out of his pocket, and asked me to marry him. I nodded my head 'yes' a few times before I could actually get the words out," said Brandy.

David designed the engagement ring. He took Brandy's mother, Tina Sanderlin, with him to the jewelry store to pick out the center stone and discuss the setting, which Brandy said made it even more special.

Wedding Planning

As the couple started planning their special day, they wanted a memorable day for themselves and guests without an enormous financial cost.

"We both wanted a more relaxed ceremony, with our favorite people and truly delicious food. We wanted the wedding to be a reflection of us and who and what we loved," said Brandy.

For their wedding date, they chose May 27, 2023, over Memorial Day weekend, "as a nod to David's military service and to our appreciation for those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for the freedoms we enjoy," said Brandy.

Next up was finding a venue and the

vendors needed for their wedding.

"We wanted the aesthetic to be classy with a nod to Memorial Day, without being over-the-top or cheesy. We wanted our wedding to feel relaxed, for both our guests and our wedding party," said Brandy.

They selected a horse farm in Appling, Ga. as their venue. This provided them with a rustic, open-air chapel barn for the ceremony and a covered pavilion for the reception.

Wanting a barbecue feel for the reception, they kept decorations simple yet patriotic. Plasticware was wrapped in red, white, and blue cloth-feel napkins featuring hydrangeas and American flags and secured with red paper poppies from the American Legion Auxiliary. For the centerpieces, they used blue and white hydrangeas, red carnations, and miniature American flags that were set in recycled candle jars, which reduced cost and waste.

They hired local caterers to cook the food, though Brandy made her family's special sauce to accompany the meats.

Continued on page 19

Lottie & Frank Lewis: Love conquers all after 42 years of marriage



Lottie and Frank Lewis on their wedding day on April 16, 1982.

Photo Contributed

Elijah de Castro

Report for America

Frank Lewis remembers April 16, 1982 like it was yesterday. It was just a year and a half after he had started dating Lottie Polite, and they were getting married.

"I remember everything about it," Frank said. "We talk about it like it was yesterday. It was just a good time."

By coincidence, they were both from South Carolina — Lottie from Allendale and Frank from Walterboro — and met while they were both working in New Jersey. In the beginning, Lottie turned away Frank's advances. However, Frank said he was persistent in the right way: by trying to

meet her standards.

Lottie wanted him to quit smoking, so he did. Lottie wanted him to stop driving fast, so he slowed down. Lottie wanted him to stop drinking; now he only has the occasional glass of wine.

Since Lottie was a single mother when she met Frank, she wanted a partner who would also be there for her daughter. So, when Frank took Lottie on their first date, her daughter came too. This, Lottie said, was an important way of communicating her values to Frank.

"Communication is real important," Lottie said. "Being able to talk about anything and everything and respecting each other. We are opposites. We like different things, but we respect each other's likes."

However, after getting married, Lottie's life brought her back home to Allendale, while Frank continued working in New Jersey. So, every other week for five years, Frank would drive from New Jersey to Allendale and back, a 28-hour round trip.

"You can tell the ones that you should consider having a life with," Frank said, a small smile on his face. "You have to be persistent to find out where their heart is and whether they're right for you. You'll know what's right for you and what you're looking for."

However, their nearly 42 years of marriage have not been an easy ride. Lewis and Frank had to learn to change together as life changed them as individuals.

"You have to be able to communicate and sometimes not be right fighters," Lottie said. "You have to ask yourself: Is it worth the argument? You always keep in the back the most important thing, and that is that you love each other. As he said, love conquers all."

In their elder years, Lottie and Frank spend time focusing on community service. Lewis, a long-time Allendale community leader, is working to increase nutritional access and leads the Allendale

Rural Arts team, while Frank helps build ramps for those in need across the county.

"I'm not gonna sit here and tell you it's just been all fun and games all the time because we've faced a lot of challenges," Lottie said. "[But] I also like his soul; he and I connect when it comes to helping other people. I have a passion for helping others, especially for the underdog and he does too."

But the Lewises are entering a new stage of their relationship: the empty nest. In December 2023, Lottie's adopted daughter Mika died, and for the first time in their marriage, the Lewises are only responsible for taking care of themselves. This adjustment, the couple said, will be one of many changes that they had to make together over their 42-year marriage.

"We just began a new chapter because we just lost our baby," Lottie said. "There's always been somebody that we've been responsible for. This is a brand-new chapter and now [we are] having to learn how to do things together again. ... But when you present your best self, the person that you love will see that light in you."



Lottie and Frank Lewis are still very much in love and committed to one another as they were 42 years ago on their wedding day.

Photo by Elijah de Castro

Four local engaged couples share love stories

Alexandra Whitbeck
Reporter

Between the proposal and the excited 'yes!' to walking down the aisle to say 'I do,' is excitingly planning the perfect day. These couples have already found each other, and are now looking for the flowers, the venue, and the dress, both locally and regionally.

Take a look into the love story of four local couples and how they are planning their weddings.

Jake Harrelson & Danielle Edwards



Fast forward to July 7, 2023, the couple were at Folly Beach for Independence Day celebrations with his family. Dani had sneaking suspicions a proposal was in the works, but couldn't convince herself.

Running behind on a dinner reservation changed their time to go look at the island's lighthouses which pushed the proposal to the last day of their trip.

"That Friday was pretty simple, we spent most of the day on the beach, we were getting even more sunburnt, and we looked for sharks' teeth. We also went kayaking with some of his family that morning," said Dani.

They ended up going back to the lighthouses to take some pictures and Jake set up his phone to record rather than a timer for pictures.

Before Dani knew it, he was getting down on one knee with a ring in his hand.

"I honestly could not believe it at all. I was so shocked in that moment," she said.

As the emotions swirled, Dani's best friend came running down the sand to take pictures of the newly engaged couple.

"At Folly Beach there is an old boat that people spray paint. All week long I wanted to paint the boat, but Jake kept telling me my ideas were silly. We had planned to paint the boat after the lighthouse, and we did, we painted "She said yes!" on it," said Dani.

The wedding will be held in May at Lakemont Chapel in Cleveland, S.C.-- a location near to both the bride's and groom's heart. Jake grew up visiting the mountain town, coincidentally the same place Dani attended summer church camp as a child.

Once their relationship began, they both returned to the camp to work and discovered the chapel.

"We were sitting by the cross and he jokingly said, 'We can get married right here'.... so we are!" said Dani.

The couple is going for a timeless, classic wedding that will bring happy memories throughout the ages. The ceremony and reception will have DIY elements to offset the traditional high cost. The couple is growing their own flowers, building their own dance floor, and recruiting family to cater for a stricter budget.

"It's moments like this that make you happy to have great friends in your life to help you out," said Dani.

Dani is a Williston, S.C. native and Jake is from Greenville, S.C. While Dani had thoughts about getting married back

home, the needed accommodations for a venue were not able to be found locally.

The couple is most excited to officially seal the deal surrounded by family and friends.

"I don't know how to put it into words, ya know. She was everything I could have wished for in a partner," said Jake.

"I knew from the moment Jake entered my life that I wanted him to stay in my life. He loves so unconditionally and has a heart of gold. He is the most supportive man I have ever met and life is simply better with him," said Dani.

Kansas Googe & Joseph Bodiford



The soon-to-be Bodifords first officially met 10 years ago at a cheer competition. Now, they are only eight months away from saying "I do" at their elegantly vintage, country inspired wedding.

Surrounded by their closest friends, Joseph got down on one knee with the sunset illuminating their favorite Edisto Island beach to profess his love for Kansas.

"The proposal was perfect in every way," said Kansas. "I always knew Joseph was the one from the first time we met. He brings me so much joy, happiness, and makes me feel appreciated everyday! So of course when he finally asked I said YES without a doubt!"

Kansas is a registered nurse at the MUSC Orangeburg Emergency Room, and Joseph is a CDL driver for Crabbe Aviation. Both are graduates of Barnwell High School.

Their November wedding will be held near their hometown of Barnwell, S.C. at an untouched venue with a "stunning view," said Kansas.

The couple is the first to get married at this family-owned location - a place the bride has special childhood memories of.

Continued on the next page

With features including a farmhouse, this venue perfectly fits the country lifestyle of both the bride and groom.

They considered other local venues while conducting their search, but ultimately decided to go with this sentimental choice.

Similarly to the venue, the ceremony and reception will be reminiscent of the couple's country-esque style with an elegant and vintage twist.

Catering and photography will be done by local vendors based in Barnwell, S.C. However, the couple had to look outside their hometown for tent, chair, and table rentals.

Kansas and Joseph are most looking forward to "sealing the deal," said Joseph. Kansas is excited to make their love "official in God's eyes and celebrating with our family and friends."

Amir Hay & Richard Finch IV



time to travel and celebrate with us," said Amir.

The soon-to-be Finches will be utilizing local services for decor, floral arrangements, and catering from small businesses to create the theme, 'The Perfect Storm,' for their wedding.

Various shades of blue will adorn their venue to represent not only the theme but their values.

"We chose shades of blue for our wedding colors because of the wedding traditional belief that blue represents love, fidelity, and trust which my fiancé and I honor," said Amir.

The traits valued by both Richard and Amir is one of the many reasons they are excited to say 'I do.' Richard is excited to marry his "caring, compassionate, intelligent, nurturing, and beautiful" fiancé. Amir is positive Richard is the "man I want to spend the rest of my life with."

"He treats me like a queen and keeps this smile I have on my face. He is a family man, compassionate, hardworking, handsome, and so loving," said Amir.

When Richard Finch IV got down on one knee to propose to Amir Hay on Thanksgiving Day in 2023, he made sure both their families were there to witness the start of their lives together.

"We are big on family," said Amir. "We celebrated Thanksgiving last year at our home filled with our loved ones. My fiancé popped the question right after saying prayer. This is a Thanksgiving I will never forget."

Being surrounded by loved ones is a big part of what the couple is most looking forward to at their October wedding. When selecting a venue, Richard and Amir want to ensure it is accessible for their family and friends "as they are taking the

Kathy Hunt & Timothy Summers



personal significance and reflects their shared faith, First Baptist in Williston.

The reception will be held at the Barnwell State Park as it offers a "spacious, indoor setting that comfortably accommodates our guest list, especially given potential cold weather challenges," said Kathy. "The park's picturesque indoor facility aligns perfectly with our desire for an indoor venue during this time of year."

"With its inherent beauty and festive spirit, we believe it's the perfect setting for our special day," said Kathy of the Christmas theme.

One unique element of their wedding is incorporating a unity sand hourglass.

"Additionally, we're excited to involve my two children in the ceremony, symbolizing the unity of our new family," said Kathy.

Tim is excited to "come together in fellowship with friends and family and celebrate this new union with the woman and family I love. And for God to bless our lives and give thanks to making a family whole again."

Tim's only regret is that he didn't meet Kathy sooner, but loves looking forward to their future, spending time together, and growing old together.

"She has made me a better man, and I will always love her for it," said Tim.

Kathy knows Tim is her perfect match; "His ability to make me laugh, his kindness, and his unconditional love despite my flaws all make him the ideal partner. Moreover, his unwavering support in everything I pursue makes saying 'yes' an easy decision," she said.

The couple has been able to secure local floral services for their wedding and has been taking recommendations from friends for catering. They are both looking forward to celebrating their union surrounded by their friends and family.

Kathy Hunt had an inkling Timothy Summers was planning to propose on Christmas Day in 2023, but was still surprised when he got down on one knee.

The couple have been together for two years and had previous discussions about marriage before Timothy popped the question after the holiday festivities calmed down.

"He seized the moment when I least expected it. Catching me off guard, he knelt down and popped the question, asking me to marry him," said Kathy.

"I feel we met at a perfect moment in our lives that is hard to imagine as just a coincidence. But a miracle," said Tim.

They have plans for a Christmas themed wedding on December 14, 2024. The ceremony will be held at a place that holds





reasons to hire a wedding planner

The average cost of a wedding in 2022 in the United States came out to roughly \$30,000, according to a survey of 12,000 couples compiled by wedding planning site The Knot. The survey also found New Jersey and Massachusetts topped the list of most costly states to tie the knot.

When committing to as significant a financial investment as a wedding, couples may want to do all they can to ensure their big day is a hit. There are many advantages to hiring a professional wedding planner, who can take the stress out of a process that should be fun.

- 1. Serves as a sounding board:** Wedding planners can take couples' ideas and turn them into reality. Seasoned planners know how to help a couple's vision come alive.
- 2. Lightens the responsibility load:** A wedding planner takes time-consuming responsibilities off couples' plates. These can include scheduling appointments, dealing with vendors, conducting walk-throughs of locations, and more. This can be a big asset to couples who work full-time.
- 3. Offers a wealth of knowledge:** A good wedding planner has years of experience handling weddings and will know which aspects will work and which may not. Also, a wedding planner can likely handle tasks expeditiously, while couples with no experience planning a wedding may not work so quickly.

4. Helps couples save money: Knowledge and experience also comes with contacts in the industry that can help couples save money. The planner likely knows where to get the best deals, and may be privy to insider pricing and other discounts.

5. Serves as a buffer: While everyone wants weddings to be incident-free, conflicts can and do arise. A wedding planner can serve as a mediator or run interference between challenging family members or even vendors.

6. Reduces overall stress levels: There's a measurable difference between the stress experienced by couples who don't hire wedding planners and those who do. The main goal of a wedding is for it to be memorable and for couples and their guests to enjoy themselves. By leaving the planning to someone else, couples can arrive at the big day feeling more relaxed and ready to have fun.

7. There is an extra person around: Wedding planners can field questions or handle tipping and other tasks on the wedding day, freeing up time for couples to have fun.

Wedding planners can provide support, expertise, company, and industry contacts to make weddings go smoothly.

Questions to ask when vetting wedding vendors

The process of planning a wedding involves the coordination of many different components, including people. It can be stressful and it can be exciting. Chances are the couple-to-be will be handling conversations with vendors they may have never worked with before.

It may be tempting to simply sign on the dotted line when hiring wedding vendors and hope for the best. But the process can prove more fruitful when couples prepare for it by compiling a list of questions designed to ensure they know what they're getting before they enter into a contract.

Is the date available? The most important question to ask is whether the vendor is available on the day you have chosen to get married. The house of worship or place where you will be exchanging vows should be set first, and then additional vendors can be interviewed to confirm their availability and the scope of their services.

How long have you been in business? How long a company has been in business, and more importantly how much experience they have with weddings, can be a telling detail. Experience is not always indicative of ability, but vendors with long track records of success may prove easy to work with.

Are you insured? Check if the vendor is insured. It can be a risky proposition to work with vendors who are not insured.

Will you be on site to oversee things? From florists to private caterers to specialty performers, it is acceptable to ask vendors if they will be there the day of the wedding to manage things or if it will be a third party or another representative. Confirm all pertinent details, including who will be there on the day of the wedding, in advance.

What is your payment schedule and cancellation policy? Understand how the vendor expects to be paid. Many businesses require a deposit up front to book the date. Some may

want payment in full a week or so before the wedding day. Others may enable you to make monthly payments for a set period of time. Ask how the vendor handles cancellations, and whether any deposit or portion of the money already paid will be refunded.

When is the last possible date for making changes? Know how long you have to make any changes to your plans, colors, music choices, or other details.

Are there any additional fees? It's important to determine if gratuity, travel, overtime charges, cleaning fees, or any other charges are included in the contract or if it leaves room for additional expenses.

Is mine your only wedding that day? How do you handle conflicts? Figure out if the vendor handles just one wedding per day or if they have staff to cover multiple weddings on a given date.

Do prices differ depending on time of day, month or year? Certain dates are busier than others. Find out if the vendor charges a premium for holidays or particular times of the year.

Couples are urged to exercise due diligence and ensure contracts with vendors specify all details before signing on the dotted line.

Options abound when shopping for wedding reception venues



Boat/yacht

Keeping with a water theme, couples may want to look into celebrating on a boat or yacht. This option can make for an especially memorable and unique experience, but it's important to keep guests in mind before booking a boat or yacht for your reception. Some guests, such as aging relatives or loved ones with young children (at home or at the reception), may want to attend the reception but not stay for its duration, which is not an option on a boat or yacht. Others may be hesitant due to seasickness or another preexisting medical condition. If no such issues are likely to present, couples may find it hard to beat the ambiance of a reception aboard a boat or yacht.

Campgrounds

The Knot reports a surge in the popularity of campground receptions in recent years. A campground reception can be ideal for couples who love the great outdoors and prefer a less formal and more fun-focused reception. This option may require a little extra coordinating on couples' part, as they will likely need to supply all of the food and beverages and may even need to arrange for guests to safely access the venue.

There's no shortage of locations for couples to host their wedding receptions. Each venue is unique, and couples can undoubtedly find a facility that has what they're looking for.

A wedding ceremony is a joyous occasion couples will remember forever. As couples walk down the aisle after making their union official, the focus then shifts to the reception, where a fun-filled night of food, laughter and dancing awaits.

Nothing can trump the ceremony in terms of meaningful moments, but wedding receptions tend to last far longer. That's why couples devote so much effort to finding the right reception venue. As couples get to work on planning their post-ceremony party, they can consider a wide range of reception venue options.

couples may find they are an especially planner-friendly option.

Beach venue

Beach reception venues are not limited to coastal communities. Though oceanfront venues are an option for couples who live on a coast or those opting for destination weddings, even landlocked locales have beach venues along rivers and lakes. When considering a beach venue, couples should inquire about contingency locations should Mother Nature not cooperate come the big day.

Banquet hall

Banquet halls are perhaps the most traditional option for hosting wedding receptions. They're also among the most popular, as the The Knot 2022 Real Weddings Study found that one in five couples had their wedding receptions at banquet halls. There's no end to the options available to couples who want to host their receptions at banquet halls, which run the gamut from more intimate venues to larger sites that can host hundreds of guests. Some banquet halls offer various rooms and even different styles of rooms, from traditional to modern, all at one site. Because banquet halls are designed to host special occasions like weddings,

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Clever ways to invite people to be in your wedding party



names of who is being asked so that everyone can toast when they say yes. In the event that someone declines, that person will still have a thoughtful memento.

- **Make custom scratch-off cards.**

This is one gamble that is likely to pay off when you present loved ones and friends with scratch-off tickets that reveal the question, “Will you be my bridesmaid/groomsman?”

- **Put together swag bags.** Take a page out of fashion shows or celebrity parties and package some luxury items into gift bags for those special people you want to stand by your side on your wedding day. High-end grooming products, jewelry, electronics accessories, and more can be great gifts for those who are likely to be in your wedding party.

- **Gift robes or T-shirts:** Plan ahead for staged and coordinated photos by purchasing matching robes or T-shirts for all the besties in the wedding party. Those who are up for having a good time will have no problem wearing the matching outfits when out for wedding-related events.

- **Fill balloons with confetti and messages.** Ask friends and loved ones to pop balloons to reveal your request that they be in the wedding party.

Engaged couples may have many close friends and loved ones they want to stand by their side during the wedding. There are plenty of fun ways to ask them to be part of the celebration.



Plenty of love and effort goes into coordinating a dream wedding. Although the happy couple garners most of the spotlight on such momentous occasions, they're not the only ones who will feature prominently in the wedding.

The wedding party is made up of bridesmaids, groomsmen, a ring bearer, a flower girl, ushers, and other guests of honor, such as a couple's parents. The wedding resource *The Knot* reports that old school etiquette once indicated there should be one groomsman and one corresponding bridesmaid for every 50 guests, although four bridesmaids and four groomsmen tends to be the average nowadays.

Choosing who will be included in the wedding party requires forethought and should not be rushed. The rule of thumb is to ask roughly a year to eight months before the wedding so those asked have time to prepare. When that time comes, these fun ideas can help couples invite loved ones to be in the wedding party with style.

- **Say it with a treat.** Remember those heart-shaped candies that come out at Valentine's Day that are printed with various sentiments, like “Be mine”? Replicate the idea by giving prospective wedding party members cookies iced to look like tuxedos and bridesmaid gowns with a phrase like “Will you?”

- **Give personalized drinkware.**

Whether it's wine glasses or flasks, have drinkware engraved with the

The responsibilities of bridal party members



A couple's wedding day is one they will never forget. Guests' focus is squarely on the happy couple on the day they're set to make their union official. However, happy couples are not the only ones with important roles to play during a wedding.

Being asked to be in a bridal party is a unique honor. With that honor comes responsibility, as each person in a bridal party can do their own part to ensure a couple's wedding day is a success.

Maid or matron of honor

A maid of honor and matron of honor perform the same functions. The terms are simply unique because a maid of honor refers to a person who has not yet gotten married, while the term matron of honor is used for a person who has gotten married. Brides also may choose a man to serve as man of honor. Whatever title is appropriate, the person who serves in this capacity will help the bride plan the wedding, including being there to offer insight when shopping for a wedding dress. This person also may coordinate the bachelorette party and periodically speak with bridesmaids to ensure everyone is on schedule. The maid of honor will typically give a bridal toast during the reception.

Best man

Don't let the title fool you, as many couples now choose to have a best woman. Like the maid of honor, the best man may be asked to help with wedding planning and is typically tasked with organizing the bachelor party and toasting the groom during the reception. The best man also can help to ensure groomsmen are on schedule with tuxedo fittings.

Bridesmaids/Groomsmen

Bridesmaids stand beside the bride during the wedding ceremony. They can help with planning and help to resolve any last-minute issues that may arise on the big day, such as a vendor arriving late.

Groomsmen stand next to the groom during the ceremony and may be asked to help the best man plan the bachelor party. Both bridesmaids and groomsmen also may be asked to help host events leading up to the big day, such as a shower or engagement party.

Ring bearer/flower girl

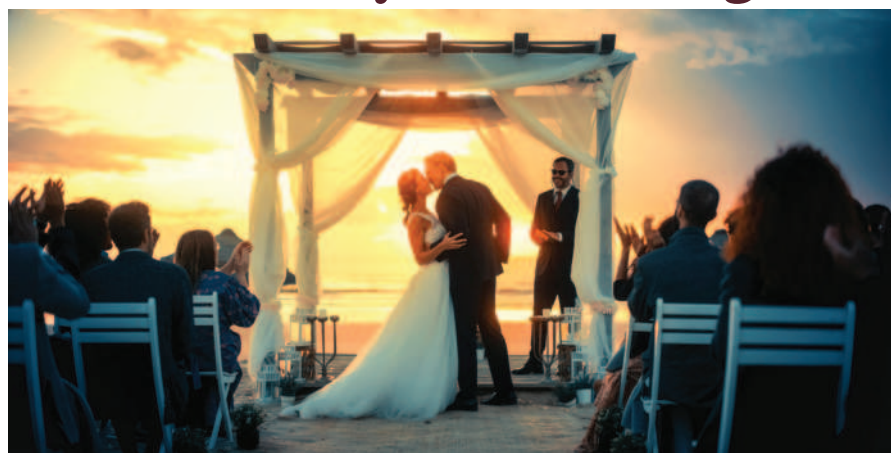
The roles of ring bearer and flower girl are typically filled by young relatives of the couple, such as nieces, nephews or young cousins. The flower girl walks down the aisle in advance of the bride, spreading pedals as she goes. The ring bearer carries the wedding rings down the aisle.

Parents

If they choose to do so, parents of the happy couple can help to pay for the wedding. The custom of the bride's parents paying the entire bill has largely fallen by the wayside, as many modern couples now pay for their own weddings. Parents can offer to pay for the engagement party and/or rehearsal dinner, but such generosity is not expected of them.

Serving in a wedding party is a unique and humbling honor. The roles of each person in the party vary, and party members who want to do their best for the couple can study up on their responsibilities in advance of the big day.

How to find the right officiant for your wedding



Weddings consist of a lot of moving parts. As engaged couples plan their weddings, many become masters at multi-tasking as they try to coordinate a day that will make them happy and prove fun for their friends and family. Deciding on a wedding officiant is one of the tasks couples will have to address in advance of the big day. There's no shortage of officiants, from religious leaders to people who specialize in nondenominational ceremonies. As couples begin the process of looking for a wedding officiant, they can keep these strategies in mind to ensure they find the right fit for their wedding.

- **Determine the location and type of ceremony you want to have.** Before they begin searching for an officiant, engaged couples should discuss where they hope to get married and the type of ceremony they want to have. This may differ within the couple, as one person might prefer a religious wedding in a house of worship while the other might want a secular ceremony outdoors or in another location. The requirements to get married in a house of worship differ by faith, and restrictions may dictate who can officiate a wedding in a church, synagogue, mosque, etc. Couples are urged to learn the qualifications to get married in a house of worship before hiring a wedding officiant.

- **Take your time and meet with various officiants.** When the time comes to interview officiants, speak with as many as possible. The interview process can give couples a feel for

what's out there and help them identify the type of officiant they want. If a rapport develops between a couple and a particular officiant, that can make for a better ceremony.

- **Consider a friend or family member.** Couples have increasingly looked to friends or family members to officiate their weddings. Statistics differ considerably depending on the source, but the 2020 Brides American Wedding Study found that one in four couples are married by a friend or family member. A friend or family member serving as an officiant can lend a more personal feel to a ceremony, but couples should first confirm a loved one is willing to take on the responsibility, which will require the individual become licensed. It also may spark some nerves, so couples should confirm the person is comfortable doing so and should not pressure someone into performing the task.

- **Ask around.** Couples who don't know where to begin when looking for an officiant should not hesitate to ask around. Wedding vendors, including representatives at the location where the ceremony will take place, may be willing to recommend officiants whose work has impressed them in the past. Google Reviews and other review aggregators also can offer insight into officiants and their approach to officiating weddings.

Wedding officiants play a significant role in a wedding ceremony. Finding the right officiant may require couples to carefully consider their preferences, including the style of ceremony they want.

Can anyone be a wedding officiant?

25% of couples surveyed said a friend or family member had served as their wedding officiant

Though it's been awhile since the poll was conducted, in 2017 the data-tracking firm Wedding Report surveyed couples who had recently tied the knot, and one of the questions participants answered concerned who officiated their weddings. Roughly 25 percent of couples indicated a friend or family member had served as their wedding officiant, and that figure pales in comparison to older studies, one of which determined the number was around 40 percent. But anyone who has attended more than one wedding in recent years has likely noticed that it's no longer unique to see laypersons officiate a wedding instead of more traditional officiants, which historically has meant clergy or other individuals with some formal affiliation with a house of worship. Though local or provincial governments may have their own unique rules and restrictions, in many places it's easy and open to anyone to become a licensed officiant. Couples who want a friend or family member to officiate their wedding are urged to make that request well in advance of their wedding, which can assure the person has ample time to complete the licensing process.

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The benefits to hosting a wedding ceremony and reception at the same venue

Streamlining the wedding planning process can help couples feel relaxed and enable them to more fully enjoy their big day. Hosting a wedding ceremony and reception at the same location is one way to streamline and simplify the planning process.

According to the wedding resource Here Comes the Guide, all-in-one venues are preferred by the majority of modern engaged couples. Couples contemplating such an approach can consider the following benefits to tying the knot and hosting the reception at the same venue.

- **Streamlined planning:** Rather than having to coordinate with two places, all of couples' attention can be directed to one location and working with one party coordinator. This can reduce the propensity for mix-ups.
- **Ease of transport:** Figuring out how to move between multiple locations and schedule hired vehicles and the like can be a chore. With one venue, guests simply arrive and are done with travel until the festivities end.
- **Seamless transition:** Sometimes there can be an awkward period between the ceremony and the reception. In such situations, a ceremony may end but



the cocktail hour is still an hour or two away. A ceremony and reception in one locale can eliminate the gap, as such venues typically begin the cocktail hour a short time after the ceremony has ended.

- **Better guest attendance:** Guests who may find it challenging to get to two different locations, particularly those who don't drive or must rely on public transportation or a taxi, may find a single-location wedding more convenient.
- **Outdoor ceremony:** Couples who want to exchange vows outdoors often can do so when they have one

wedding location because the nuptials are taking place outside of a house of worship, which may not allow for an outdoor wedding due to the sanctity of the location.

- **Fewer travel worries:** With a single location, it makes it much easier if inclement weather dampens the occasion because there is far less traveling involved.

Couples can keep in mind that a single-location wedding may come with some challenges. Unless the location is on the grounds of a house of worship, the wedding may lack the religious or spiritual component that some couples aspire to. Also, weather can cause issues if couples had hoped to have the ceremony outdoors and must move it into the same space as the reception as a plan B, necessitating a turnover of the room. Couples also may be limited in their photo backdrops, as there will not be two separate places where photos are taken, particularly if the wedding space is limited.

Hosting a ceremony and reception at a single location can benefit couples who want to simplify and streamline their wedding planning.

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Popular wedding photography packages



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More inclusive packages also may include engagement photo sessions and even after-wedding bookings for post-honeymoon or first anniversary shoots.

In addition to online galleries and a printed wedding album, an advanced package may feature albums for parents and matted and framed portraits. If the photographer contracts with a videographer, packages also may combine photo and video services and share the digital files accordingly.

Photographers often have various packages that can accommodate couples working on budgets of various sizes.

Capturing the memorable moments of a wedding is a necessity. Hiring a talented photographer is an important component of wedding preparations. The best way to preserve a wedding day for years to come is through photographs and videography.

The Knot 2022 Real Weddings Study indicates 88 percent of survey respondents hired photographers for their weddings, and the average cost for a professional photographer is around \$2,600.

When couples begin to vet local photographers, they quickly will learn that many photographers bundle their services into packages. Each package will contain some standard offerings, which typically expand as the price goes up. Although each photographer will do things a little differently, here is a generalized idea of what wedding photography packages may entail.

Base photo package

The base package likely will include the services of one photographer and potentially a helper. The photographer will be available for a predetermined period of time to capture both the ceremony and the reception. This package will include an agreed upon number of edited proofs, of which the couple can choose a specific number that will be processed for viewing, sharing or printing. The photographer may sign over print rights, or you may need to

use them exclusively for prints depending on the package and price. Proofs and processed photos typically are shared through an online link.

Intermediate photo package

An intermediate photo package will build on the base and will include additional services. The photographer may take photos at a set number of alternative locations. This can be advantageous if you'd like to take photos at a nearby park or seaside location. This package also may extend how long the photographer will be with you, with some arriving early to take "getting dressed" photographs.

Intermediate packages may include a full printed and bound wedding album for the couple, and print rights to even more processed photos in an online gallery for sharing. This package also may allow couples to share the gallery with others so they can view and print their own photos.

Advanced photo package

A soup-to-nuts photography package is often the most expensive and extensive package a photographer offers. It may include an all-day commitment from the photographer and an assistant, unlimited locations for photo shoots, exclusive print rights to the couple for any photos that have been captured and processed, and other perks like extensive retouching and photo editing of photographs.

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Simple tips to plan a fun and relaxing cocktail hour



With so much on their dockets in relation to wedding planning, engaged couples can be forgiven if certain components garner less attention than others. The ceremony and reception are bound to stay on couples' radar, but what about the time in between saying "I do" and cutting a rug on the reception room dance floor?

Cocktail hours are a great way to keep guests entertained between the ceremony and the reception. Many couples use this period to take their bridal party wedding photos, so offering guests a little food and some drinks during a cocktail hour can benefit everyone. Planning a cocktail hour is not a significant undertaking, but couples can keep a few pointers in mind as they plan this interim period between the ceremony and reception.

• Opt for an outdoor cocktail hour when possible. Couples tying the knot in spring, summer or fall at a venue with ample outdoor entertaining space can choose to host the cocktail hour outside. This reduces the likelihood that guests will feel cramped and it also sets a positive tone for the remainder of the evening. A balcony, patio or rooftop entertaining area can be great spaces for guests to mingle prior to the reception.

• Offer seating. Cocktail hours tend to be stand-up affairs where guests mingle with long-lost friends or relatives while enjoying some light

hors d'oeuvres. However, older guests or guests with small children will appreciate some seating. Couples need not ensure there's a seat for each guest, but some strategically located high-tops and more traditional tables for guests with mobility issues can ensure anyone who needs to sit down can do so.

• Give guests something to do. If the cocktail hour will be a full hour or more, couples can consider ways to help guests pass the time. Some may be content to relax and chat with friends and family over a drink, but others may grow a little bored as the hour drags on. A photobooth or selfie station so couples can have a ready-made wedding album before the reception begins can be fun for guests. For less formal affairs, consider providing some popular outdoor games, like cornhole and bocce.



• Set a tone with music. Music can help set the tone for a cocktail hour, which is not meant to get the ball rolling on the dancing-heavy revelry to come during the reception. Some simple instrumental music, whether it's provided by a live string quartet or pre-recorded, can establish the cocktail hour as a peaceful period to relax, chat, eat a little, and enjoy a drink before the reception begins. Reserve the dance music for when the reception hits full swing.

It's easy to overlook the cocktail hour when planning a wedding. However, some simple tips can ensure guests enjoy the time between the ceremony and reception.

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What to know when picking a wedding reception menu

Lots of details require a decision when planning a wedding. Engaged couples may or may not enjoy tending to much of the minutiae involved in wedding planning, but the reception menu is typically one popular point of interest.

When picking a wedding reception menu, couples typically get to sit down with their venue operator or caterer and take a taste test so they can decide what to include and exclude come the big night. That typically results in some happy hearts and full bellies. But there's more to picking a reception menu than taste, and the following are some pointers couples can consider as they aim to provide a tasty meal for their wedding guests.

- Resist the urge to make the menu reflect your personal preference. Couples, particularly those footing the bill for their own weddings, may be tempted to pick exclusively foods they like for the reception. Though it's important that couples get to enjoy their first meal together after tying the knot, it's good to ensure that guests get to have an enjoyable meal as well. Resist any urge to let personal preferences dictate the menu, particularly if you have a restrictive diet. For example, vegans need not insist everyone eat a vegan meal at the reception nor should meat lovers insist that every plate end up with some red meat on it. Diversify the menu so people with various preferences can fill up and enjoy their dinner.
- Inquire about food allergies. When inviting guests, ask them to cite any food allergies



they may have when they RSVP. Many banquet halls and caterers are now accustomed to accommodating diners with food allergies, but the earlier that information is communicated, the more time couples have to pick delicious foods that won't compromise the health of guests who must avoid certain dishes or ingredients.

- Align food with degree of formality. It's important that couples consider the ambiance of the wedding when picking a reception menu. A pig roast might be ideal for a backyard wedding, but something more formal is called for when dining in a lavishly decorated banquet hall. Couples can keep this in mind when choosing the menu. It's also notable that caterers tend to have a creative side, so they might be able to present certain foods in ways that match the vibe of

the wedding even if those dishes would not ordinarily align with the ambiance of the reception.

- Leave the experimentation to the cocktail hour. If couples have certain exotic foods in mind, they can still serve those items but do so during the cocktail hour. Guests can simply turn down the chance to try exotic foods during the cocktail hour without going hungry. But a sit-down dinner should ensure every guest has something to fill their belly.

Picking a reception menu is a fun and filling component of wedding planning. Keeping some simple pointers in mind can help couples pick a menu everyone can enjoy.

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Dig into these wedding cake options

Something sweet comes near the end of a wedding reception and that is the joy the couple experiences knowing they have their entire lives ahead of them to enjoy together. However, there is another sweet treat that is shared near the conclusion of the wedding and it is typically served with tea and coffee: the wedding cake.

Wedding cake traditions can be traced back to the ancient Greeks and Romans. Cakes represented good luck and fertility for the couples tying the knot. The first wedding cakes were rather bland and breadlike, representing purity and virginity. Some were quite like the fruitcake now enjoyed during the holiday season. Eventually wedding cakes transformed into the sweet confections that are known today. The modern wedding cake as most know it debuted at the 1882 wedding of Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany. His wedding cake was actually the first to be completely edible. Previously, some cakes featured wooden broomstick pillars covered in icing, but the Duke's cake used a hardened type of icing, according to Edible Art Bakery and Dessert Café.

Couples today have many options when picking their wedding cakes. The following are some wedding cake tidbits to chew on.

- **Couples can choose among various cake styles.** Many opt for a classic style, which is typically a white or ivory tiered cake with simple, elegant decorations. Rustic cakes may be much less ornate, while modern cakes may be rectangular or square and feature clean lines and minimalist decoration. The cake should fit the overall theme and scope of the wedding as it is another complementary component of the larger celebration.

- **Wedding cakes can be quite costly.** Wedding Wire estimates the average wedding cake costs around \$500. One way for couples to save on their cake is to have a faux cake on display, with one tier that is made from cake and can be cut. Guests will then be served slices



The average wedding cake costs around **\$500**

of a sheet cake that is much less expensive.

- **Couples have many flavors to choose from.** Vanilla is classic and quite popular because it appeals to a vast number of people. Lemon, chocolate, and carrot are some other popular cake flavors.

- **When it comes to frosting a cake, there are various outer coatings that will encapsulate the cake to make it both beautiful and durable.** Buttercream, Swiss meringue, fondant, cream cheese, and ganache all can be used in various applications. Some bakers attest that Swiss meringue, due to the addition of egg whites, makes it a more stable option over traditional buttercreams, particularly during

warm weather. Of course, couples can opt for a “naked cake,” which usually has a scant amount of frosting so that the cake underneath peeks through.

- **A groom's cake used to be tradition, but largely fell out of favor, although it is still alive and well in the American South.**

The groom's cake typically is less ornate than the wedding cake, and favors the groom's choices in style, interests and flavors.

Couples and their guests look forward to indulging in wedding cake near the end of the reception. The looks and flavors of a wedding cake can be as unique as the couple saying, “I do.”

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Time management tips for your wedding day

Maintaining and distributing a schedule of the day's events, including hair appointments, can help engaged couples keep their wedding day timeline on track.

As any married couple can attest, a wedding day has a tendency to fly by. Couples have much to do on the day they tie the knot, which can make the day feel like a whirlwind.

Certain skills can come in especially handy on a wedding day, and the ability to manage time is certainly one of them. As their big day draws closer, couples can employ these time management tips to slow the day down a little bit.

- **Create and distribute a schedule.** A schedule can ensure the happy couple and all members of the bridal party know when and where they need to be at certain times during the day. Include all pertinent information on the schedule, including when and where hair and makeup appointments begin, when transportation to and from the ceremony and reception site will arrive and, of course, the start time for the ceremony. A printed copy can help, but a digital copy sent via text or email can guarantee the schedule is accessible via smartphone at all times during the day.

- **Collaborate with your photographer in advance of your wedding day.** Couples can streamline wedding day photography sessions by collaborating with their photographer in advance. During these sessions, identify the bridal party shots you want to take and then create a schedule of photos so all party members know where they need to be and when. Some couples choose to schedule

bridal party photoshoots before the ceremony, while others prefer theirs after the couple has made it official. Regardless of which option couples prefer, schedule these photos so no time is wasted finding bridal party members.

- **Don't forget to set aside time to eat.** Anything can derail a wedding day schedule if it's forgotten when couples devise their initial plan for how the day will unfold. Couples might be less inclined to forget hair and makeup appointments and photo sessions because such components are integral to wedding planning. But couples should not forget to leave time for themselves and their bridal party to eat. Schedule a breakfast for all bridal party members (separate ones if couples insist on avoiding each other until the ceremony) to ensure no one sleeps in and throws off the day's timeline. Include time to eat lunch if the ceremony is in late afternoon or early evening. If you forget to schedule time to eat, the timeline will almost certainly be thrown off when everyone gets hungry and requires some sustenance.

- **Go over schedules with your vendors.** In the weeks prior to your wedding, reach out to your vendors to confirm the day's timeline. Do this prior to handing out a schedule to your bridal party so no one is confused if any last-minute changes are made.

Couples have much to manage on their wedding days. Perhaps no component is more important to manage effectively than time.

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Wedding day transportation options

Weddings involve many moving pieces that must all come together successfully for one glorious day. Transportation is among the details that need to be sorted in advance, particularly when wedding parties and guests must move between ceremony and reception sites.

It is customary for the wedding party, which tends to include a couple's parents, to be provided a ride to both the ceremony and reception. Furthermore, couples may have to figure out what to do when the wedding is over, particularly if the reception and ceremonies are a good distance apart. Here are a few transportation options couples can consider.

Limousines

Limousines are classic modes of transportation to and from momentous events. They typically feature seating to accommodate six or more people. Limousines typically bring the wedding party to the ceremony, then wait for the duration and transport everyone to the reception. Then the cars will leave from there unless other arrangements are made.



Party bus

Many couples opt for a party bus to transport themselves and/or their wedding parties. Party buses are larger than limousines, and as their name implies, often establish a festive atmosphere. Couples may ask their wedding party members to meet at the ceremony location, and then a party bus will take everyone to the reception location after vows are exchanged. Party buses often play music and have refreshments available. They can be entertaining on long rides.

Shuttle bus

Couples can consider providing a shuttle to and from the airport or between other points to facilitate ease for the wedding party and guests. A shuttle can take individuals from the reception site to a nearby hotel if overnight stays have been booked. A shuttle can bring certain individuals back to the ceremony site, a transportation hub or another centralized location where they can get to their own private vehicles and back home. The couple also will need transportation home or to embark on the honeymoon, so it's helpful to have reliable taxi service numbers or rideshare options at the ready.

Transportation is not a glamorous part of wedding planning, but it is a necessity that should be ironed out well in advance.



Tips to plan a perfect honeymoon



Couples have much to look forward to when planning their weddings. In addition to the momentous occasion when they say "I do," couples can look ahead with excitement as they anticipate spending time with family and friends in a fun setting.

Though the wedding day is the focal point of couples' planning efforts, the post-wedding honeymoon also merits ample consideration. A honeymoon is the first trip many couples take together after tying the knot, and many will never forget this special excursion. As couples pore over the details of wedding planning, they may want to consider these tips to ensure their honeymoon is a trip to remember for a lifetime.

- **Identify your dream trip.** There are no rules regarding honeymoons. Though couples' budgets and professional obligations may factor into where they can go and how long their honeymoon can be, couples can discuss their dream trips and then determine if they can make those dreams come true on their honeymoon. Couples who have always aspired to backpack through Europe should consider that a possible honeymoon trip. If a food tour of Italy is on couples' bucket list, then investigate how feasible that might be for your honeymoon.

- **Stay up on current events.** It can be easy for couples to get lost in the weeds while planning their weddings and miss what's going on across the globe. However, knowledge of current events can be vital when planning a honeymoon. Faraway and exotic locales may seem tailor-made for a honeymoon, but that's only the case if such destinations are not plagued by civil unrest, conflict, natural disasters, or other events that can affect how safe it is to visit such places. The U.S. Department of State maintains a free, easily accessible list of travel advisories at travel.state.gov. The Government of Canada maintains a similar list at travel.gc.ca.

Couples are urged to visit these sites before booking their honeymoon, particularly if they hope to travel internationally.

- **Consider amenities and all-inclusive packages.** All-inclusive packages can be a great deal, particularly for couples who want their honeymoon to be all about relaxing at a single resort destination. All-inclusive packages cover the cost of food and most beverages, making these options both convenient and budget-friendly. When going this route, couples also should decide which amenities they want to access on their trip. Access to a gym and/or spa, activities like parasailing, and other perks are just some of the potential amenities couples can look for as they choose a honeymoon destination.

- **Collaborate.** A honeymoon may be the first trip couples take after tying the knot, and it can lay the foundation for future collaborative efforts. Planning travel is not always so easy, so couples can work together and make any necessary concessions so each person gets what they want out of the trip.

Some simple strategies can help couples plan and enjoy a honeymoon they are likely to remember for a lifetime.

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Brandy & David Dodds *Continued from page 4*

Overall, the planning process alternated between easy and a bit stressful, mainly due to the couple doing a lot of things themselves.

“The biggest stressor--other than maintaining a reasonable budget--was simply the time-crunch, as we got married about six months after getting engaged,” said Brandy.

Throughout the process, the couple learned about one another even more.

“I learned how greatly she pays attention to details, that she is very hardworking, and that she is a sentimental person,” said David.

Brandy said she learned “how patient and easy-going David is, and how helpful he is in helping me relax and take things moment-by-moment. He helped me realize there are some things I just have to let go, and that things will still be alright.”

Including the people who are special to them was very important. This included Brandy’s 91-year-old great aunt serving as a flower girl alongside David’s daughter, plus local musician friends providing music for the ceremony and reception.

The Wedding

The big day finally arrived.

“When we first discussed having our wedding day over Memorial Day weekend, essentially in an outdoor venue, David was very concerned about the heat and humidity factor. As it happened, our wedding day set a new record for lowest high temperature (64 degrees) in the CSRA in more than 100 years,” said Brandy.

As an added personal touch, David and Brandy wrote personal letters to each other, which they read during the ceremony.

One of Brandy’s childhood fairy tale wedding dreams was to have “Kiss Me” by Sixpence None the Richer play as the officiant said, “You may now kiss the bride.” David surprised her by making that dream a reality.

Sage Advice

The Dodds have advice for other couples as they plan their own special day.

“Remember what the day is supposed to be about--a celebration of your love and commitment to each other. It’s not about a big party for other people. You shouldn’t have to put yourself in debt for a single day. This day is just the beginning of your life together, so it’s important to make smart financial decisions even in wedding

planning,” said David.

Brandy said it’s important to make the day “unique to you” and not worry about impressing others.

“If you enjoy the day, the people there to support you will too,” she said.

As they approach their one-year wedding anniversary, the Dodds said they have grown as individuals and as a couple.

“I have grown more secure in who I am, who we are, and what we want for our future. I’ve learned that our love for each other is genuine, and that I can trust him to do what is best for me and for our family,” said Brandy.

For David, he’s learned how to be less selfish. “It’s a good and necessary thing to try to put another’s needs equal to or ahead of your own,” he said.

They encourage other couples to make sure they are prepared for marriage.

“Make sure the person is with you for all of the right reasons,” said David.

Brandy said it’s important to look for little ways each day to make your significant other’s day better and to make sure they know how much you appreciate them.

“You have to compromise and forgive. Appreciate your differences and view them as strengths,” said Brandy.



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