

Mayor donates his wedding fees to the BASCC



ROSE WEBER

Birmingham Mayor Rex A. Martin does a lot more than make two people happy when he officiates at weddings. He also provides more services for area senior citizens.

One of the privileges that goes with the position of mayor is the ability to officiate at weddings within the Birmingham city limits.

"All of the mayors of Birmingham have married people and as far as I know have donated the fee to their favorite charity," explained Martin. When Martin was elected mayor last November he decided to set the honorarium amount for weddings at \$100 and to donate all fees to the Birmingham Area Seniors Coordinating Council and Center.

"I decided it would be a nice way to raise money for BASCC. I have served on their board and it is one of my favorite organizations," Martin said. In this time of declining incomes for non-profit organizations, he saw the weddings as an opportunity to raise money to help offset possible losses.

According to Carol Marsh, BASCC coordinator, the money

has been added to the general operating fund to provide more needed services for seniors. Couples give a number of reasons for using Martin's services, from wanting a very private, simple ceremony to varying reasons for not going through the clergy.

One couple did not even want to provide witnesses for the ceremony. They were being remarried after a divorce and wanted to do it as quietly and discreetly as possible without a lot of fanfare so they could surprise their children.

"In that case I told them to come on into the chambers in the Municipal Building and I would even provide the witnesses," Martin said.

Couples learn of his availability from the court's office (the pro-

bate judges are not always available at the time of the proposed wedding), county clerk's office, previous couples or sites of weddings such as The Community House.

Martin's home telephone number is given out by Birmingham's city clerk to inquiring brides-to-be. He has available two slightly different services, one is more generic and can be modified with the couple's own vows or wording. They can add passages from scripture or completely rewrite the service to include their own personal beliefs.

"I am very flexible, I want to do what makes their day special. When I started to perform the ceremonies, I would get caught up with the emotion of bride and

groom but I have learned how to contain my own emotions to help them," Martin said.

Sometimes both bride and groom will begin to cry during the ceremony. Martin had one bride who cried from the moment she entered the room. He talked to her quietly for a few moments before beginning the ceremony to help her calm down.

"In those instances I always slow the ceremony down, and when giving them the vows to repeat, I give them just a few words at a time so they can manage to remember them," he said.

Martin's flexibility extends to the site of ceremony and how informal or formal the occasion. He has performed weddings in chambers at the Municipal Building,

outside the building on the front steps, at The Community House, at the Allen House, at the Townsend Hotel and at private homes.

Couples wishing to be married need to file with the county clerk for a marriage license, bring the papers to the Birmingham city clerk and pay a \$10 filing fee, which covers the cost of paperwork and returning it to the county clerk's office. The marriage has to be performed within the city limits of Birmingham but the couple does not have to be residents. They also need two witnesses at the ceremony.

"I usually wear a suit, but they can be as informal as they like and can have as large or small a wedding party as they want," he said.

How does Martin feel when performing the ceremony?

"It's really touching. A good feeling. They are so appreciative. I often wonder if I'll see them down the road or if they'll stay in touch," he said.

Martin still has two months to go of his term of office as mayor and looks forward to marrying a few more couples in that time.

"I'd really like to do a lot more. It helps out not only the couple but also the seniors of Birmingham, and I like that a lot," he concluded.

Rose Weber is a freelance writer covering items of interest to and about seniors. You may call her at 646-6992 or write *The Eccentric*, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

Spouse

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term illness. Although coverage is available for spouses who decide to place their husband or wife in a nursing home or a hospital, there is no way to compensate those who decide to take care of their mate at home.

"There is no help from our government," Hopper said. "The family unit's financial distress is great."

Still, the group's primary purpose is to simply provide an emotional outlet.

"People can share whatever stage they are in, because we've all gone through this," Hopper said.

Indeed, there are some things, Stubenvoll said, that only another well spouse can understand.

"People have said, 'this is the only place I've felt comfortable.'"

The Rochester area group meets 7-9 p.m. the fourth Thursday of the month at the Wright Filippis Building, 2845 Crooks, between M-59 and Auburn Road.

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