

# down the aisle

By KATHY PARRISH

Traditionally, a bride wears something old on her wedding day. This year it could be the gown.

With wedding costs skyrocketing — and sentimentality returning to the fore — many brides are recycling dresses worn by their mothers, sisters or friends.

Those without lovely hand-me-downs can scout them out at Velvet Pumpkin Bridal Exchange.

Open since June, the Waterford resale shop specializes in wedding attire. A bride, mother of the bride and attendants — provided they wear the "right" sizes — can outfit themselves in once-worn dresses for a fraction of what new gowns cost.

"Prices just keep going up and up," said storeowner Carol Cawley, who also stocks new dresses that were sample styles or from stores that went out of business.

"It's hard for people to swallow the cost for a one-time thing."

Velvet Pumpkin accepts only clean dresses in good condition. They're usually less than five years old because Ms. Caw-

ley believes styles look dated after that.

One of the storeowner's concerns was that women wouldn't part with the once-in-a-lifetime purchases. But she's pulled in gowns from all over the state.

"I DIDN'T know if they'd buy used dresses or if gowns would be available," said Ms. Cawley, who sells the gowns for \$200 or less which she splits with the original seller.

"But when it comes to money, they will."

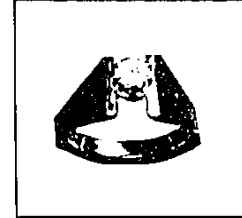
She admits the divorce rate has helped business, making women more anxious to part with an old gown and to need a new one.

Open less than a year, the business has expanded. As well as more than 200 bridal gowns, she offers custom fit bras and lingerie — all new —, custom flower arrangements and bridal odds and ends like ring bearer pillows. Part of the building is rented to a photographer who, coincidentally, takes wedding photos.

"I really cater to the girls," said Ms. Cawley, who throws in a facial with purchases.

Continued on Page 16

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