

# Chapels a popular wedding backdrop

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The bride and her wedding party step out of the limousine and the driver pulls away — with a half-dozen boutonnieres left inside.

A wedding catastrophe, in most cases, but not at The Little Wedding Chapel in Farmington Hills, located in

## CHAPELS

a busy strip center with a full-service florist just doors away.

"Oh, this happens. It's not a problem," says an unruffled Debbie Higgins, one of the chapel's wedding coordinators.

Besides helping couples plan their ceremony, Higgins will make arrangements with selected vendors for invitations, photographs, cakes, tuxedos, receptions, limousines, horse-drawn carriages and live music, all at special prices for couples exchanging vows at the chapel.

The Little Wedding Chapel, in the Orchard 12 shopping center at Orchard Lake and 12 Mile, is the product of longtime friends Shari Johnson, Sharon Reed and Irene Bruza, who have years of management and sales experience between them.

The three opened the Victorian-style chapel in 1990. Today, there are franchises in Taylor, Mich., and San Antonio, Texas; the partners' goal is to have a chapel in every major U.S. market.

On a busy Saturday, weddings are scheduled about every 90 minutes. Some dates are booked for 1994, but it's possible to plan even a formal wedding in a few days, says partner Shari Johnson, a non-denominational minister who marries about 95 percent of the couples in a candlelit ceremony.

The chapel, which seats up to 65, is tastefully decorated in dove gray with white Victorian accents, French doors, a gas fireplace and a staircase leading to the bride's Victorian dressing room. Silk bouquets decorate each pew.

"Our ceremonies are reverent, conservative and traditional," Johnson said. "Afterward, especially if it's a family's first chapel wedding, most everyone says they feel a sense of satisfaction; that's a wonderful way to begin blending families."

So far, the partners say the chapel has hosted "tons of ceremonies," including small and large weddings, first and second marriages, vow renewals and the nuptials of some local celebrities.

Claudia Baugher and Gary Myers of Livonia looked at several places before choosing The Little Wedding Chapel for their wedding in February. It was the bride's first marriage, the groom's second.

For a shopping center location, Myers says he was surprised by the chapel's intimacy and attractive decor.



JIM JAGDFELD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Just a token:** *Elegant things come in small packages. The pastel-colored porcelain candle holder and accent pieces make thoughtful shower gifts or remembrances for the wedding party. At Laurel Boutique in Laurel Chapel Center, Livonia.*

Baugher especially liked the chapel's restful colors and fireplace. "We're not members of a church. But we're spiritual and we wanted a meaningful ceremony," said Baugher, who had two attendants and about 40 wedding guests.

The owners' goal is to make each couple feel their ceremony is the only one that day.

"We're not a Las Vegas chapel. Las Vegas minimizes a wedding — we maximize it," Reed said.

The fee for a Little Wedding Chapel ceremony is \$175 (\$200 on weekends). That includes the minister, rehearsal, music, chapel decorations and use of the dressing room.

At Cameo Wedding Chapel in Plymouth, owner Joan Burger's goal is to create memories. "I've had brides say maybe they don't need to walk down an aisle and I say, 'Yes, you do,'" said Burger, who opened the chapel in Charlestowne Square two years ago. "Brides and grooms need that memory; ceremony is important."

The Colonial-style chapel, furnished with old oak church pews, seats up to 60. Burger found the chapel's 120-year-old lead-glass doors, which have a cameo etched in the center, in a Plymouth antiques store.

She thinks the chapel's traditional decor, coupled with Plymouth's old-world charm, bring many couples from as far as Monroe. A wedding boutique,



JIM JAGDFELD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Exchanging vows:** *Choosing a chapel wedding was a compromise for Dana Goscinski and Curtis Cureton of Northville. He suggested a civil ceremony but she wanted a formal family wedding. Both said the chapel was the perfect place for their nuptials, which included 30 guests and two attendants.*



WILLIAM HANSEN

**Last minute:** *Claudia Baugher (Baugher) Myers of Livonia looked at several area chapels with husband Gary before choosing The Little Wedding Chapel. Here, the bride takes a moment alone before the ceremony in the chapel's Victorian-style dressing room.*