

Marriage mini-mall unveils 1-stop service theme

BY JANICE TIGAR-KRAMER
SPECIAL WRITER

Laurel Chapel Center in Livonia may be the only place around that offers one-stop wedding planning and shopping under one roof.

Owner John DeSignore, who also runs the adjacent Laurel Manor Banquet and Convention Center, came up with the idea for this mini-mall with friend Ron Reck, the mall's co-owner.

The mall houses a traditionally styled chapel that seats 110, and six other wedding-related businesses. They are: The Best of Times Entertainment, Hearts & Roses Florist, Ashleigh's Limousine Service, Guiliano's Salon, Ultimate Image Photography, and Laurel Boutique, which represents President Tuxedo and Pastry Palace.

Couples who use the chapel also get discounts from Lina's Bridal in Plymouth, Laurel Manor, and Fonte d'Amore restaurant in Livonia.

By design, the year-old business, at Newburgh Road and I-96, is a short walk from Laurel Manor, which often hosts receptions for couples who marry at the non-denominational chapel.

"Nothing like this had been done before," said Reck, who also owns the center's photo studio and manages the complex with wife Kathy. "It's ideal for busy couples who don't have the time to look all over town for the things they'll need for a wedding."

After comparison shopping, the Recks say the services offered at the wedding mall are competitively priced. But couples who rent the chapel aren't required to use the other vendors, the two point out.

It's difficult to imagine that this tastefully decorated complex once was a vacant Knights of Columbus hall. Today, expanded to about 6,000 square feet, the well-designed mall has a Victorian-style bride's dressing room, a spacious entry for greeting wedding guests, and an outdoor garden often used for photographing the wedding party.

Occasionally, the chapel is reserved a year in advance, but it's possible to plan even a formal ceremony with a week's notice, says Kathy Reck. Couples may use their own minister or rabbi to officiate, or use the clergy available through the chapel.

The Recks, whose own wedding was in a church, say the chapel fills a specific need. "We're not trying to take the place of the church, and we are definitely not a Las Vegas chapel," Kathy said.

Laurel Chapel was an ideal place for Jean Ledger and David Napolitano's wedding last February. Since it was a second marriage for the Canton couple, they decided to bypass the series of questions and answers required to marry in their own church. Instead,

they asked the Rev. Joe Hutchinson, a relative of Jean's, to officiate at the chapel.

"Many times, couples have to go through a rigorous ordeal to get married in a church if they're not members," said Rev. Hutchinson of Warren. "I like (the chapel) concept; it fits a

niche."

The fee for weekend weddings is \$225, which includes one hour of chapel time, pre-recorded music, pedestal flowers, use of the bridal suite, and rehearsal time. Monday to Thursday weddings are \$195. The minister's fee is extra.

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open to the public and adjacent to the chapel, sells invitations and other wedding odds-and-ends.

Burger, formerly a special education teacher, gives couples plenty of leeway in planning their ceremony. Though pew bows and bouquets come with the chapel, one couple decorated the room with nine potted evergreens and a mural of Mount Rainier, the site of the marriage proposal; their music was a recording of nature sounds. Couples can write their own vows or choose a non-denominational service.

Brenda Ost of Plymouth liked the way Burger planned a family ceremony that included the presentation of medallions to her husband's two children.

"She (Burger) was patient and calm and open to everything," said Ost, who married at the chapel in September. "I

was marrying my husband and his children, so we wanted them included."

Besides a chapel ceremony, Burger can arrange a wedding at the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Plymouth Township, where husband Robert Burger is pastor.

Cameo Wedding Chapel is one of a few places that rents bridal gowns and dresses for attendants and mothers-of-the-bride. Rentals for brideswear starts at \$115; other dresses are \$75 and up.

The chapel fee of \$225 includes the minister, recorded music or electric piano, candle setting, chapel decorations and use of the bride's dressing room. Weddings are planned about 90 minutes apart. The church fee of \$550 also includes the minister, organist, candles, rehearsal, wedding consulting and church cleanup.

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