



Wedding plan tasks now a family affair

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ents of the bride, Smith said, are apt to be interrupted during the reception with caterer's questions, paying the musicians and other important issues.

"I wanted to be able to enjoy the experience," she said. "It goes so quickly."

Martel points out that there is a lot of stress for parents. A coordinator is an experienced person who can provide peace of mind for those involved. She is often contacted by a bride's mother.

"Sometimes they can be in a kind of panic, sometimes they live a distance away. If the groom's family is in the area, both mothers can become involved, she said. "They want to enjoy the day themselves. They want the assurance that someone has an overview of everything that is happening."

Martel became professionally involved with weddings 11 years ago, after helping an acquaintance with her daughter's wedding. The mother was busy opening a store, Martel recalled, the daughter was in another state, and the bridegroom's family in another country. After that successful wedding, other people approached Martel and asked for her help.

Whether or not a family has professional help, Martel agreed, they should begin with a budget. "They don't want to wind up in debt for the rest of their life," she said. "We try to keep the fantasies they want with what is possible. Many people, for example, want an outdoor wedding, but that may not be possible in terms of weather."

Smith's daughter was married at Sleeping Bear Sand Dunes. Smith said she had played near there on the beach as a child and Leelanau County held many meaningful memories for her daughters, too.

"Many guests came from England," Martel recalled. "They said the ceremony on the dunes alone was worth making the trip."

Martel advises her clients to try to decide what is most important to them.

"If you use the services of a coordinator, try to choose someone who can get the sort of music and photos you want. Because of the high cost of weddings, parents want to be sure they get what they are investing for," she said.

A coordinator can ease a stressful situation because a coordinator is neutral. And if a bride wants something specific, the coordinator can back her up.

"She can quote the coordinator," said Martel.

If the parents of a bridal couple have concerns of faith, they should discuss them with their pastor. Rev. Terry Baird, retired Presbyterian pastor, conducted many marriages over the past 42 years.

"I work on the assumption that this is the wedding of the couple,

and my primary responsibility is to the couple," he said, "But over the years, I've held a lot of hands, and some of those who were anxious were the parents. Parents are always involved, to some extent."

He said that in his years in the ministry, he married very few teen-age couples. More recently, newlyweds tend to be about 30, he observed. Sometimes the parents were from different countries and had just gotten together for the first time.

"There is lots of e-mailing and phoning," he said.

In some cases, couples wanted to be married in a church to which neither belonged. A method that worked well in Pastor Baird's Findlay, Ohio, church was to have the couples attend six sessions to learn about the church. That way, he said, they felt more connected, and more familiar with the people,

Photo/Brian Confer
When Markelle Smith and Samuel Rowlett married at Sleeping Bear Dunes last summer, there were challenges: the bride lived in Oregon and the groom's parents were from England. The bride's mother, Dee Smith of Traverse City, hired a wedding planner to help out.

such as the organist who would be involved with the wedding.

"The church was more like home to them," he said.

Pastor Baird has always advised couples and families: "If there are problems, please don't fret. Call me. I've seen all the problems before and we can work it through."

Sheila Garrett is a local freelance writer.



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