

Get me to the church on time — in style

BY NANCY SUNDSTROM

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With weddings today, the concern seems to be more on doing it in style, which can mean anything from hiring a horse and carriage to make a dramatic entrance at the ceremony to being whisked away to the reception in a super stretch limo.

In northwest Michigan, the business of providing transportation on a couple's wedding day has become a competitive one with many more options now available for customers. From Mackinaw City to Gladwin, there are a number of limo rental services that can meet a wide range of needs when it comes to making sure you travel in comfort and style on one day you want to be perfect down to the last detail.

Grand Traverse Limousine Service was the first of its kind in the area, and owner Dave Jones says that if someone thinks they want a limo on their wedding day, they should make inquiry about availability as soon as possible.

"On weekends between May and October, there are far more requests for limos than there are cars to go around in northern Michigan," said Jones, "which means you should call as early as you can. There are a lot more options for photographers, caterers and florists than there are limo services, so if you think you want one, prioritize and book early so you won't be disappointed."

Grand Traverse Limousine Service carries "traditional, six-passenger limos," which are featured on their Web site at www.gtlimo.com. Jones said that they have deliberately specialized in vehicles of that size in order to concentrate on catering to the bride and groom, as opposed to a large wedding party.

"With a few different limos, we can transport the entire wedding party, but we like having our niche of rolling out the red carpet for the bride and groom in the first moments of their new life together," said Jones.

"And we do that, literally. Our drivers wear tuxedos, they roll

out a red carpet, and then we present the bride and groom with a complimentary bottle of iced champagne as we take them from the ceremony to the reception," he said. "After all the craziness of the day, we give them a few minutes to savor the moment and each other... It's a chance for them to regroup and take a breath before the reception, and we do everything we can to make that time special."

Mike Bryan has owned Majestic Limousine in Traverse City for the past three years, and his business focuses on squiring larger bridal parties about town. Majestic

Limousine has two 2001 eighteen passenger Lincoln Town Car limos, two 18-passenger Ford Excursion limos and one 24-passenger limo coach bus. Pictures of the cars can be seen on the web at www.majesticlimo.com.

Bryan, too, recommends early booking of a vehicle, but stresses even more important is for customers to ask a service about their safety record and general business credentials.

"It always surprises me when people seem more concerned about a car being new and clean than they are with a company's reputation or being sure that they and their vehicles are

licensed and inspected," said Bryan. "Once you've done that, look at a vehicle to make sure it's what you want and that it will work for all your needs on your wedding day."

In addition to limousines, there are some other wedding day transportation options. Other luxury cars can be acquired through car rental service. There are two horse and carriage providers in the region, Jeff Forsythe (369-2129) and Birdie Abraham (389-2306).

And in Grand Traverse, Leelanau and Benzie counties, the Bay Area Transportation Authority (BATA) has a trolley service that can accommodate 24 people and anyone in a

wheelchair. There are a few caveats to securing their service, though.

Steve Geer of BATA said that because they receive state and federal funding, they cannot compete with private trolley enterprises. In this area, that means Mackinaw Trolley, which is based out of Mackinaw City. Between May and October, those wishing to hire the trolley must first request the service from Mackinaw Trolley. If they are unable to supply transportation, then BATA can be engaged to do the same at a rate of \$65 per hour for a minimum of two hours. For more information, call BATA at 941-2324.

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