

Food

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Formal, full sit-down dinners are the hallmark of Stafford's Bay View Inn in Petoskey. The inn hosts about 30 weddings a year, ranging from a dozen to 250 guests. One unusual option is that the inn allows wedding guests to order from a menu, with the on-site restaurant providing each cooked-to-order meal.

"We have two kitchens on the premises: our restaurant production kitchen and our corporate kitchen," said Dean Smith, innkeeper and general manager. "We do a lot of in-house training in the corporate kitchen and develop or make recipes for the restaurant. In the evening, we can use this for banquet catering; we have scads of equipment."

Remaining flexible is key to success at wedding catering. Ken Stevenson, owner of South City Limits in Traverse City since 1979, said buffets are still king but upscale weddings often have a variety of food stations and hors d'oeuvres.

"They'll be all different things in seafood and personally carved meat items and dessert pastries with all different types of fillings," Stevenson said.

He noted that his separate catering staff can feed wedding parties for 100-1,000 people, with the average being 300-400 attendees. His executive chef, Bob Lyons, works with each bride to accommodate budget, tastes, style and dreams.

"We can do everything from elegant table service, including white gloves, to buffets," he said. "We have a mid-range menu [at the restaurant] but our catering far and away exceeds what we can do in-house because there's not enough market for restaurant



Above, non-traditional desserts like chocolate fondue are sometimes served along with the traditional wedding cake. Right, a server from Grandview Catering offering wedding guests an appetizer.



menus at that level."

Although they see a growing demand for a range of stations and other creative options, many of Crystal Mountain's weddings still include a buffet style meal. Sometimes with a twist, said Mitzie Hoeh, catering manager for Crystal Mountain Resort in Thompsonville.

"The other trend is to have family style, like a mini buffet at each table," she said of an option they

added to their wedding offerings a year ago.

"That's great for conversation for people who don't know each other."

Many brides are saying good-bye to traditional wedding cakes as well. Caterers have seen everything from dessert buffets to cheesecakes to tiers of different flavored cupcakes.

"Not everybody likes wedding cake," said Foltz.

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