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The Wedding Guide

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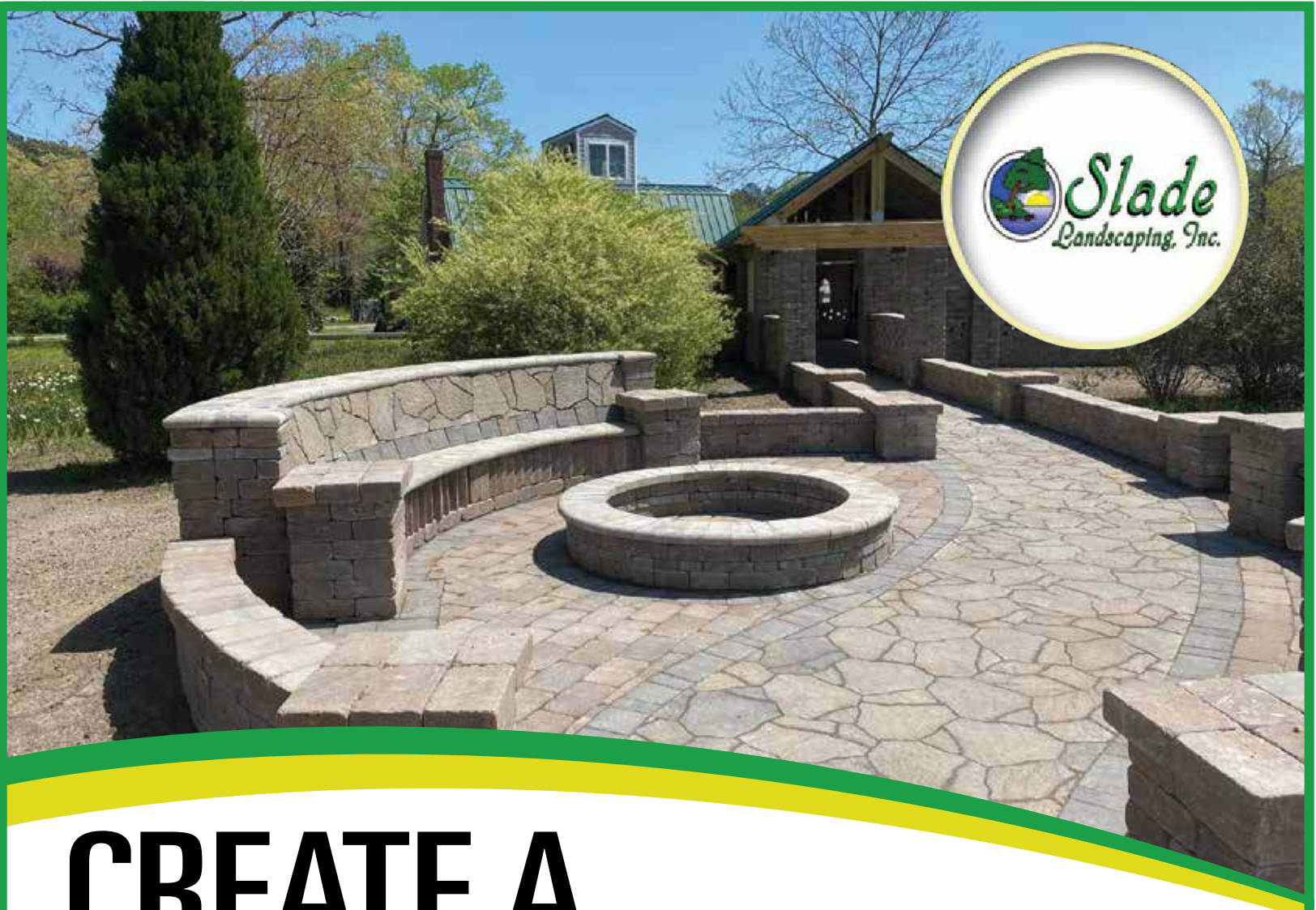
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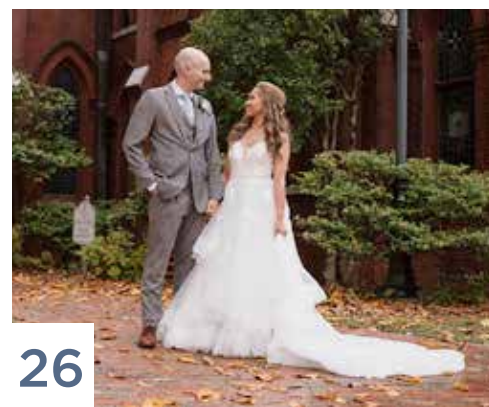
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How to pick the perfect ring

Local experts help couples choose the engagement rings of their dreams

STORY BY HOLLY JACKSON

DIANIELLE FLETCHER PHOTOGRAPHY

There are so many options to consider when purchasing an engagement ring. Until recently, couples had limited choices - gold or silver, princess or emerald cut. Today, there's a vast selection of shapes, sizes, metals and whether or not to purchase naturally mined or lab-grown diamonds. Some couples weigh the option of buying a vintage ring or using an heirloom. With so much to think about, selecting an engagement ring can feel like a daunting task.

Two jewelers in Washington have provided their best advice for couples looking to find their engagement rings - their tangible evidence of each other's steadfast commitment and everlasting love.

Stewart's Jewelry Store and McKeels Fine Jewelers have 166 years combined of trusted experience and expertise in helping couples find rings that fit their styles and budgets.

The first piece of advice both stores give is to set a budget before making an appointment. When couples agree on a budget prior to their appointment, it gives jewelers parameters of which rings to show them.

"Buy what you can afford. Don't put yourself in a bind buying a ring just because somebody else has, because you can always upgrade," Aaron Adams said. Adams is the general manager at Stewart's Jewelry Store.





Wally McKeel, owner of McKeels Fine Jewelry, preaches that the quality of a gemstone is more important than its size, because if a gemstone is low-quality, it will always be that way.

When it comes to picking the shape of the diamond or gemstone what's most important is to consider your significant other's personal style. This is a ring they will wear forever; therefore, it should fit right in with their sense of fashion. Do they wear gold or silver more often? Do they wear a lot of color or neutrals? Do they wear statement pieces or minimal jewelry? Take notes on your partner's style to help you choose an engagement ring they will want to wear every day for the rest of their life.

Adams' advice for couples is to pick a ring that is "timeless" that "will always be in style."

"Try to watch out for the trends. Trends change. Go with timeless, because you're

always in style, and it always looks great," he said. "Pick out something you're going to be proud of and can pass down."

McKeels echoed the same sentiment. They are seeing couples pick out halo rings that have a "vintage" or "estate" look, Christine McKeel said. "It's definitely popular, and it's a classic look. It's never really goes out of style."

Couples should consider researching lab-grown diamonds if they are looking to purchase a diamond at a lower price point. Lab-grown diamonds are virtually the same in shape and grade as natural ones. Both are real diamonds that possess similar chemical, physical and optical properties, according to the Gemological Institute of America. The difference that means the most to couples is that lab-grown diamonds cost between 60%-85% less than natural ones, says international jeweler, Queensmith.

Both jewelers are seeing a rise in popularity in lab-grown diamonds, because of rising costs of natural diamonds.

"At this point in time, the major difference is the price factor. The two carats can be \$3,000 [for lab-grown] versus \$20,000 [for natural]. I mean, that's a nice honeymoon," Wally McKeel said.

Each engagement ring is as unique as the couple who purchases it; therefore, the price of the ring depends on what size, shape and metal the couple selects.

Couples looking to have a one-of-a-kind ring may choose a gemstone other than a diamond. Both Stewart's and McKeels have seen engagement rings with sapphires or emeralds.

Couples getting married a second time will often choose sapphires or emeralds for their rings at Stewart's.



At McKeels, couples have picked rings that mix sapphires with a center diamond stone. Gemstones other than diamonds are commonly placed in the wedding band.

One trend Stewart's and McKeels have seen in recent years is the use of an heirloom piece. Couples are choosing rings and gemstones from necklaces that have been passed down from one generation to the next. They take the piece(s) to Stewart's or McKeels to customize them into the perfect engagement ring.

"If you're using a family heirloom stone or something you're just resetting it or restyling it and it's just a new mounting. Sometimes it's just as simple as changing the center section and leaving the band the same since it's a family piece," Adams said.

"I think that's the way to go if you have a piece that's been handed down," Christine McKeel said. "People may come in and say 'this was from my grandmother's necklace' and 'this was from my mom's wedding ring' and they want to put those things together into a new piece. Sometimes it's not just a ring. It may be other pieces, but the stones are beautiful."

Not to mention, using an heirloom piece is cost-effective compared to buying a ring that is in stock.

Couples who choose to make an appointment with Stewart's and/or McKeels can expect to spend around 30 minutes looking at rings. That may seem quick, but given both jewelers' years of experience, they can quickly assess a couple's likes and dislikes and make judgements on which rings to show.

"It's a very easy process," Adams said. "Some people are intimidated by it, but it's not. It's personal style."

Stewart's Jewelry is located at 121 N. Market Street, and is open from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. on Saturdays. They are closed on Sundays. They can be reached at 252-946-2611. McKeels is open every day except Sunday from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. They are located at 231 Mid Town Lane. They can be reached at 252-940-9207.



LLIE NICHOLS

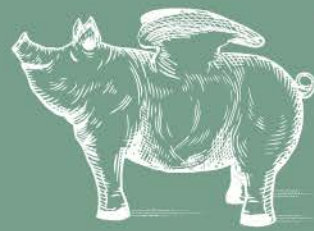


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My forever Valentine

JANIE PAGE AND SKYE WILSON
FEB. 15, 2025

STORY BY HOLLY JACKSON
PHOTOS BY PAMELA JENKINS

For love to bloom, sometimes, all it takes is one person planting an idea, like a seed, into their friend's mind about a guy they should date. Such was the story of Janie and Skye's relationship. Janie was friends with Skye's sister. Janie said Skye's sister, "always planted seeds with each of us about a potential set up."

Skye's brother-in-law is a pastor of a church in Durham. Serendipitously, it was the same church Janie attended. On the weekend of the church's anniversary, Skye traveled to Durham from Greenville, South Carolina to visit his brother-in-law and participate in the anniversary festivities.

"We went on several dates throughout the weekend while he was in town and quickly started dating, despite the distance," Janie said. "We got engaged over Labor Day weekend at Atlantic Beach and Skye then made plans to move up to Durham. Overall, quite an expedited timeline, but it really is true that when you know, you know!"

Why did you choose Washington as your wedding location?

We knew we wanted a shorter engagement season to not prolong the wedding planning process. And I really wanted to get married at my home church. I love the proximity of the Civic Center from there, and the overall



Vendors for Janie and Skye's wedding

Welcome Party: *Fox Hollow Farm*

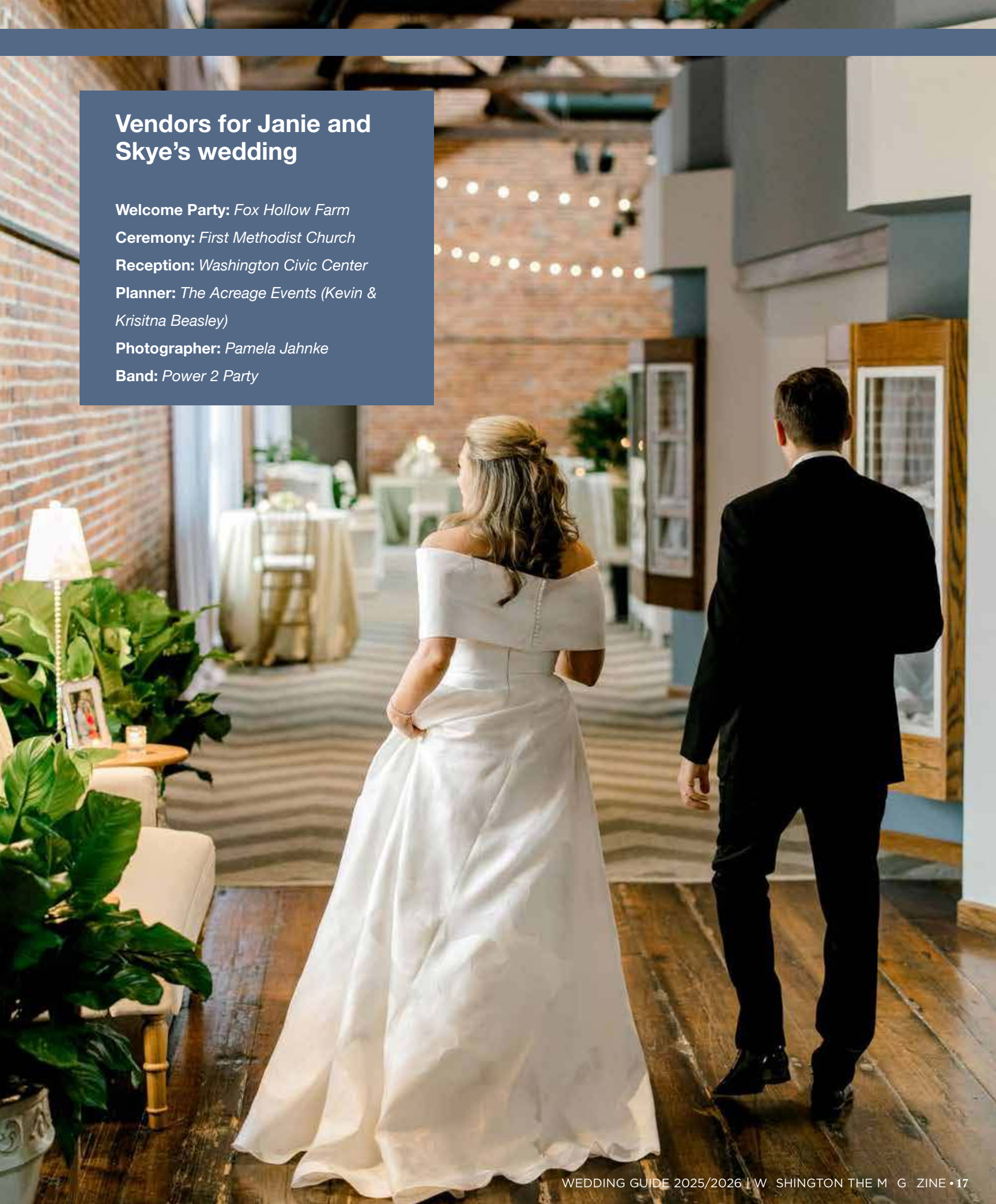
Ceremony: *First Methodist Church*

Reception: *Washington Civic Center*

Planner: *The Acreage Events (Kevin & Krisitna Beasley)*

Photographer: *Pamela Jahnke*

Band: *Power 2 Party*





proximity to downtown.

I grew up in Washington and really liked the idea of getting married in my home church. Not to mention that my mom really carried a ton of the weight in planning the wedding, so it was great to have her familiarity with different vendors in the area, along with an army of family friends who could help execute everything! Not to mention the obvious charm of a cute coastal town.

What was the theme of your wedding?

I would probably describe it as fairly traditional. I hope we accomplished an elegant aesthetic. I do think we really valued our service feeling worshipful and faith-filled. And we wanted our reception to be tons of fun. We hired an amazing band out of South Carolina, Power 2 Party, and they absolutely made the reception! They bring so much energy and have a wide ranging setlist. Truly no one wanted to leave the dance floor for even one second.

How did you personalize your wedding?

Skye's brother-in-law officiating a service in my childhood church was a very special element for us. Other special personalizations were that my mom got a journaling Bible instead of a traditional guest book so we could have guests sign a message of wisdom or encouragement by their favorite verse.

I also think specialty cocktails are a great way to personalize the day. We recreated a hibiscus margarita from my favorite bar in Durham called "The Page Turner" and Skye had a bourbon drink called "The Wilson Reserve."

We passed out heart sunglasses on the dance floor as a fun way to commemorate Valentine's Day, and we were loaned a bunch of "crazy hats" from a family friend. They ended up being such a hit on the dance floor! They made every look super silly and festive.

When you look back on your wedding day, what was one thing (or several things) you did that you're so glad you did?

I'm so glad we had a wedding planner. Special thanks to Kevin and Kristina Beasley and the whole team at The Acreage Events. Our families really did not lift a finger all weekend because their team thought of everything. They made our vision a reality. And even above and beyond our vision. Their attention to detail and thoroughness throughout the entire process was amazing! They are truly the best of the best.

Two other things- first, I'm really glad we did a first look. I'm fairly traditional so I was opposed to this in theory. But because the sun sets so early in February, it was recommended that we do a "first look" so that we would have enough time to take photos before the sun had set. It ended up being such an emotional and special time that Skye and I could cherish privately. And it helped get the nerves out!

Second, we did a welcome party on Friday night where all of our guests were invited to meet us after the rehearsal dinner for cocktails and dessert bites. This completely allowed us to visit with and welcome all of our guests without feeling overwhelmed with that desire to welcome everyone at the reception.

Is there anything you would change about your wedding day?

Overall, there is really nothing I would change. Large scale, it would have been such a dream to have a spring/summer wedding to allow guests to take full advantage of the warmer weather and the beautiful waterfront. But there really is something to be said about vendor availability in the middle of winter (and better pricing too). We also noticed that guests are much more available in the "off-season" and were looking for a fun outlet to liven up the dreary months! Plus, we really look forward to future anniversary trips where we can escape somewhere warm in the cold winter months.

How did you plan your budget?

I think it's about choosing what is most important to you. We knew we wanted to have a really great band so we probably spent a disproportionate amount on entertainment than other areas.

Is it normal to feel nervous?

Yes! I had so many friends have to completely change their wedding in the peak covid era of 2020-2021 which made me nervous. Also, because of the winter season, we were so nervous about getting the flu or a virus during the wedding week that we tried to pseudo-quarantine for the weeks leading up to the wedding.

Skye says he definitely felt most nervous about the first dance. It's so many eyes on you and it can almost feel like you're performing for your guests. We were glad to get that over with!

While we hope everything goes smoothly during the planning process- and especially on the wedding day - we know that one or two things may not go as planned.

What funny mishaps happened either during planning or on the wedding day?

We were planning to spend our wedding night in a cute downtown Airbnb. The day before the wedding, there was a power surge that blew the HVAC at the AirBnB and it couldn't be repaired in time.

Our host was so accommodating though and did everything she could to make it right (including many space heaters)! Thankfully, we were lucky to have unseasonably warm weather on Saturday so the accommodations were very comfortable.

The only other challenge in the process was in trying to find a rehearsal dinner venue. Skye's family was given a tall task. All of the local restaurants were anticipating full bookings for Valentine's Day. We ended up having it at Fox Hollow Farm, which was great to have a venue where we could also have the Welcome Party. It was perfect!

Casual conversation with a chance of rain

MICHAELA JONES AND CHASE JOHNSON
JULY 10, 2024

STORY BY HOLLY JACKSON
PHOTOS BY MADDY HIRWELL

What started as a casual conversation between two college students with mutual friends, became an everlasting love for Michaela Jones and Chase Johnson. They were at the right place at the right time, Michaela said.

Why did you choose Washington as your wedding location?

Growing up in the area, Washington has always held a special place in my heart—but it became even more meaningful for the two of us. My husband and I share so many memories on the waterfront! During the two years we were long distance, any time Chase was in town, a date by the water was a must.

What was the theme of your wedding? What vibe(s) were you going for?

Southern classic with a touch of coastal flair.

I fell in love with the character of the Washington Civic Center—the exposed beams, wide-plank wood floors, and vaulted ceilings gave the space so much warmth and charm. It was important to me that everything we brought in complimented the building's natural beauty while reflecting our vision for the day. Our color palette was a delicate mix of sage green,



A full-page photograph of a wedding couple standing on a wooden dock by a body of water. The groom, on the left, is wearing a black tuxedo with a white shirt and a black bow tie. He is holding a white umbrella over both of them. The bride, on the right, is wearing a white, sleeveless, V-neck wedding dress with a long train. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a calm body of water with some trees in the distance under an overcast sky.

Vendors for Michaela and Chase's wedding

Getting ready: *Elmwood 1820*

Ceremony: *Washington Civic Center*

Reception: *Washington Civic Center*

Decorator/Florist: *Your Perfect Day*

Photographer: *Maddy Harwell*

DJ: *Generations DJ*

Drinks: *Pour Decisions*

Food: *Reverie Luxe*



baby blue, and floral-inspired tones. We wanted something that felt fresh, romantic, and timeless—tones that would enhance the Civic Center’s natural beauty without overpowering it. The florals added the perfect touch of softness and whimsy, tying everything together beautifully. We entrusted Your Perfect Day to bring that vision to life, and they were truly phenomenal!

How did you personalize your wedding?

We found meaningful ways to honor our families throughout the day with small, thoughtful touches. While subtle to most guests, each gesture carried deep personal significance and made our celebration feel uniquely ours. My bouquet held a special heirloom Bible gifted to me by my mother-in-law, lovingly attached by our florist. Magnolia leaves, meaningful to the women on my dad’s side of the family, were woven into the welcome table arrangement as a quiet nod to our roots. We also paid tribute to Chase’s late father with a carefully designed boutonniere that featured his birth month flower—delicately included throughout our floral designs as a heartfelt remembrance.

When you look back on your wedding day, what was one thing (or several things) you did that you’re so glad you did?

I’m so grateful we took the time to partner with vendors who genuinely understood us as a couple and brought our vision to life. With so many decisions to make during the planning process, it can quickly become overwhelming. We made it a point to do our own research, consider our venue’s recommendations, and trust the experiences of family and friends. In the

In the end, we truly couldn’t have chosen a better team—they made our day everything we dreamed of and more.

Is there anything you would change about your wedding day?

One piece of advice I’d share with







future couples is to allot more time than you think you'll need throughout the day. If you're working with a planner or coordinator, they'll be instrumental in helping establish a realistic, well-paced timeline. It's always better to have a few extra moments to breathe and take it all in, rather than feel rushed or risk falling behind schedule

How did you budget for your wedding?

When it comes to budgeting for a wedding, the first step is identifying what matters most to you and your partner. For some, it might be stunning floral arrangements; for others, it could be custom cocktails, a show-stopping cake, or live music. Knowing your shared priorities makes it much easier to allocate your budget in a way that feels meaningful and intentional. Once you've pinpointed what's most important to you both, you can begin evaluating your available funds and researching vendors who align with your vision and values.

Is it normal to feel nervous about the wedding day?

The entire week leading up to your wedding can be incredibly stressful, and it's easy to get caught up in the pressure of it all. With everything happening it is normal to feel nervous but try not to let that overshadow the beautiful moments and the love surrounding you. Remember, it's about celebrating you and your partner, with the people who care about you most. The wedding day itself is a long one, so be sure to get plenty of rest the night before so you don't start off the day feeling exhausted. Once you wake up, it's go time—nonstop from start to finish. The nerves might still be there, but take a moment to breathe it all in. It goes by so quickly, and you'll want to savor every moment.

While we hope everything goes smoothly during the planning process— and especially on the wedding day — we know that one or two things may not go as planned.

What funny mishaps happened during planning or on the wedding day?

On the day we were scheduled to take our engagement photos, my husband forgot to bring shoes! We traveled in from out of town, and he only had the pair he'd worn earlier that day. Thankfully, the weather was beautiful and our photographer was incredible—him being barefoot actually suited the relaxed, natural setting perfectly, and it ended up being one of our favorite details from the shoot.

They say rain on your wedding day is good luck, and we definitely tested that theory. As a hurricane approached the Southeast, I was overwhelmed by the forecast — thunderstorms for the entire weekend. Miraculously, we had beautiful weather leading up to the ceremony, and though rain did eventually roll in, it allowed us to break out the clear wedding umbrellas. In the end, those umbrellas gave us some of our favorite photos as husband and wife—unexpected, romantic, and completely unforgettable.

How to look picture-perfect on the big day

STORY BY **HOLLY JACKSON**

THE GREENES PHOTO AND FILMS

Classic, timeless and elegant are adjectives today's Beaufort County brides are using to describe the look and feel of their wedding day. Two Washington formalwear shops know that to bring a bride's vision to life, it starts with her dress, her groom's suit and the bridal party's cohesive look.

AVA Formals and Russell's of Washington are here to help everyone look their best on the big day.

At AVA Formals, Beaufort County brides-to-be are falling in love with the idea of wearing a simple dress they can personalize with accessories. They are mixing traditional and modern to create looks that are unique to them, but stays true to their vision. "I feel like the brides make their own styles," Rebecca Taylor, owner of AVA Formals, said.

Most brides at AVA Formals choose popular fit-and-flare or empire dresses with sheer bodices or corset tops, then add traditional touches like lacy Cathedral length veils.

Taylor's biggest piece of advice for brides shopping for their wedding dress is to keep an open mind. Sometimes, it's the wildcard option that wows brides.

"When brides come in here, I try to pull one of every style so they can rule out styles that don't work for them. Be open to whatever style, because you'd be surprised









sometimes that style looks better on you than what you really thought," Taylor said.

Her second piece of advice for brides is to be very intentional about inviting family and friends to shop. The opinions of those invited set the tone for the shopping experience and influence how a bride sees herself in a dress.

"You know your family better than anybody knows your family. Some brides do not bring their family with them, but they bring a friend or someone close to them. Some brides do bring their family, and they're overjoyed. So, you really have to know the person that you're inviting - if they're going to be very opinionated or not," Taylor said.

Once a bride falls in love with the dress of her dreams, it's time to pick out the rest of the wedding party's attire.

Brides aiming for a timeless look, shouldn't be afraid to let their bridal party show off their personalities. A timeless look can still be achieved if bridesmaids select dresses that come in varying shades of the same color or select the same color dress in different styles. They can have different

jewelry or hairstyles. Guys can wear different bow ties or neckties from the groom. They can have different color suits from the groom or have socks that show off their interests like hunting, fishing or golfing.

Rhonda Lyons, of Russell's, says it's her job to help the bridal party look picture-perfect.

"I try to get the bride and the groom to look at things from the audience's perspective and as if they were looking at a picture. So that it all coordinates nicely," she said.

Lyons sees more couples picking out tuxedos for their black tie or black tie optional weddings as opposed to suits in recent years. "For a while there it was more casual and I mean more suit-worthy. I'm now seeing more tuxedo rentals as well as black-tie, black-tie optional weddings."

This also means that guests attending either black-tie or black-tie optional weddings are coming into Russell's to rent or purchase tuxedos, she added.

She also sees couples selecting suits or accessories for the groom that are different from the groomsmen. "The brides want to set

the grooms apart from the bridal party. So, oftentimes, whether it be a bowtie or a necktie or a totally different suit for the groom."

Lyons advises couples to make sure that what they pick out as far as suits and dresses fits the everybody type in their bridal party. "Most of the time, brides are picking out what they like, and what they've seen. It's very important for brides and grooms to take into account which styles fit their bridal party best."

Lyons recommends couples schedule an appointment at Russell's six to eight months before the wedding day to discuss their vision. Three months before the wedding, the groomsmen will come into the shop to get their measurements. Russell's offers suit and tuxedo rentals for an all in price of \$196.42 with tax.

Brides shopping at AVA Formals should budget around \$1,100 for their dress - not including alterations. Brides should start shopping nine to 12 months before their wedding date with the goal that their dress is ordered eight to nine months before the wedding.

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Say ‘I Do’ at the Civic Center

WASHINGTON’S HISTORIC WEDDING GEM

STORY BY ELLEN BR BO

THE GREENES PHOTO ND FILMS

In the heart of downtown Washington, North Carolina, the Washington Civic Center stands as a testament to history and modern elegance. Once a bustling train depot, this now sophisticated wedding venue retains a rustic charm melded with contemporary sophistication — an ideal backdrop for couples looking to weave the richness of history into the tapestry of their future.

“It’s a historic building with a lot of character,” expressed Paula Stephenson, the Tourism Development Director for the City of Washington. “It has a rustic beauty but is really a blank canvas, limited only by a bride’s imagination.”

It’s this versatility that endears the center to couples looking for a venue that can be transformed to reflect their unique love story.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Civic Center boasts 14,000 square feet of event space, accommodating up to 200 guests comfortably. Included in their wedding package are a variety of tables and chairs, including round and rectangular tables for dining and classic white wedding chairs.

“The venue is big enough for large celebrations, but the character and layout of the building allows for an intimate space for any size event.” shared Charlotte Stubbs, the Venue and Event Manager.





THE GREENES PHOTO AND FILMS



The Civic Center's two-day package affords couples the luxury of time. The ease of transition from preparation to celebration is part of the venue's charm.

"Couples can fully set up on Friday, have their rehearsal dinner here, and then use the venue as a home base on Saturday," explained Stubbs.

A unique feature of the Civic Center is the 'Something Borrowed' room. Here, couples have access to an array of décor items such as greenery, table pieces and signage, all included in the rental package.

For those considering smaller gatherings, the Civic Center offers a micro wedding package for events with 80 people or fewer, providing more flexibility in scheduling.

Looking ahead, it's crucial to plan early. The Civic Center is a coveted location and is typically booked a year in advance. For those willing to consider weekdays, Thursdays and Sundays offer more flexibility for scheduling your celebration.

"We're currently booking through 2025, with almost full availability a year out — 2026 and peak months are already full," advised Stubbs, urging couples to plan ahead.

Whether it's a grand affair or an intimate celebration, the Washington Civic Center melds historical ambiance with personalized flair. For the most up-to-date pricing information and to schedule a tour, interested parties are encouraged to inquire via the Civic Center website at www.washingtonciviccenter.com.



Washington Civic Center at a Glance

Historic Charm: Listed on the National Register of Historic Places

Capacity: Comfortably accommodates up to 200 guests

Event Space: 14,000 square feet available for ceremonies and receptions

Vendor Flexibility: Freedom to work with your chosen vendors

Wedding Packages: Starting at \$3,550, with a variety of options

The 'Something Borrowed' Room: Complimentary access to decor items

Micro Weddings: Special packages for smaller gatherings

Bookings: Advised to book at least a year in advance



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YOUR WEDDING CULINARY GUIDE

STORY BY ELLEN BRUBO

THE GREENES PHOTO AND FILMS

Embarking on the journey towards your wedding day is filled with moments of love, excitement, and let's admit it, a bit of planning-induced stress. But fear not, our local experts are here to offer their seasoned advice on catering and wedding cakes, ensuring your path to marital bliss is as delectable as the cuisine you'll serve.

Catering to Your Love Story

The first chapter of your wedding feast begins with choosing a caterer who understands your story. Chrislyn Beresheim, the owner of Carryout by Chrislyn in Washington, believes that the foundation of a memorable wedding menu is built on trust and tailored tastes.

Sanitation scores, reputation and a tasting that tantalizes—these are the ingredients for catering success according to Beresheim.

"I think all of that as a package shows you what that business is like," said Beresheim. "For a wedding, you really want to make sure all of those different areas are accurate."

Chrislyn's Tips for Tailored Catering:

1. Start by assessing the caterer's sanitation scores and reputation.
2. Schedule a tasting to familiarize yourself with their culinary style.
3. Understand your guests' preferences and balance them with your own.





4. Consider the season and how it influences the menu.
5. Know your budget and communicate your expectations, from fine China to family-style servings.

LLIE NICHOLS

Venue, Vision and Viands

Your venue sets the stage, and Beresheim emphasizes the importance of your caterer's familiarity with the space. A caterer's prior experience with a venue can ease logistics and enhance the dining experience, whether you're dreaming of a buffet or a plated dinner.

Quick Tip: Inquire if the caterer has worked at your venue before. Their insight could be invaluable for seamless service execution.

When to Secure Your Caterer

When should you begin this pivotal planning piece? "As soon as possible," advised Beresheim. This gives you ample time to explore different styles and menus, ensuring that your caterer can capture the essence of your celebration without rushing the creative process.

Designing Your Dream Wedding Cake

Transitioning to the grand finale, we turn to Grace Hedgepeth, the confectionery visionary behind Sugar Plum Baking Company in Greenville. Hedgepeth knows that the wedding cake is more than a dessert; it's a statement piece that reflects your shared tastes and the theme of your wedding.

Pop Fact: Vintage inspirations and botanical beauties are the current darlings of wedding cake fashion.

Grace's Recipe for the Perfect Wedding Cake Experience

1. Begin your cake journey early, ideally a year in advance.
2. Savor the tasting, choosing flavors and fillings that resonate with your palates.
3. Be clear about your budget and explore options that align with it.



4. Plan for cake preservation if you intend to savor memories on your first anniversary.

5. Above all, Hedgepeth insists, "Do what you want to do! Don't let others influence you. It's your big day and you should get what you want!"

Taste the Love

The tasting is a pivotal experience where you'll be presented with a selection of flavors to try—typically you can expect three cake types and icings, along with two fillings. This is where your senses lead the way.

"Cake tastings are a great way to get to know the baker and find what you love most," elaborated Hedgepeth. "You also go over all the details for the day of, plus design your dream cake."

Preserving Traditions

Don't forget the top tier tradition! A

piece of cake might seem like a simple tradition, but it's an emblem of your first shared moments as a married couple.

"The trick to keeping your anniversary tier as fresh as possible is correct sealing," explained Hedgepeth. She recommends wrapping the cake in plastic wrap three times and then storing it in a ziplock bag to ensure that when you celebrate your first year together, it tastes as sweet as the day you said 'I do.'

Bringing Your Day Full Circle

Whether it's savoring the rich flavors of a carefully crafted menu or indulging in the delicate layers of a custom-designed cake, your wedding day is an anthology of moments that should be distinctly yours. Let the catering nourish your guests and the cake commemorate your shared sweetness, each element reflecting the essence of your journey together.



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Preserving your lifelong memories

STORY BY **CLARK CURTIS**

HENRIK ELYNN

Shop around is the best advice when selecting a photographer to capture those cherished memories on your wedding day. And the sooner the better. Booking a photographer should be done no less than nine to twelve months out from the wedding, and even longer in some cases, depending on the month. “Try not to make rash decisions when selecting a photographer,” said Will Greene of The Greenes Photography. “Sit down and meet with any number of photographers and check out their portfolios. You may have a certain style that you are looking for so make sure what they do is the right fit for you.”

“Be sure to look at their editing styles and how they shoot, as it will give you a good idea of what they have to offer and what your wedding may look like,” added Haley Braddy of Haley Braddy Photography. “It is all about building a relationship and working with someone you feel comfortable with.”

Photographers will often have a standard list of shots that they will take, but couples need to make sure to let them know if there is any specific one they are looking for. And don't be shy to show the photographer examples of things you may have seen that caught your attention. Also if the bride and groom have any pictures they really like from their engagement, they are urged to share those as well. Making sure everyone is on the same page at the





onset will help to ensure the results the couples are looking for.

Making a family photo list will also pay big dividends come wedding day. “We emphasize that the couple come up with as detailed a family photo list as possible,” said Greene. “The more we know in advance the smoother things will go overall. It is important for the photographer to know where photos of the entire family will be taken and what time. It is also important for family members to know in advance where they need to be. That way we can have a specific day-of checklist and can cross the items off as we go. The last thing the bride and groom need to be thinking about on their day is making sure folks know where they need to be and on time. Proper planning with their chosen photographer and the wedding planner, will certainly make for less of those anticipated anxious moments.”

Another recommendation for the bride and groom is to keep their expectations in check. “Couples need to understand that despite the best planning and preparations, things don’t always turn out as expected,” said Braddy. “That’s just the nature of things. Circumstances of the day can often keep that “perfect” shot from happening, so it is good to keep that in mind.”

Another thing to consider is having a definitive budget. It will be very helpful in determining exactly what can and can not be done.

And if it is an outdoor wedding, have a rain plan. “Couples need to have a rain plan already figured out,” said Greene. “Trying to figure out plan B when the clouds open up is not the time to be doing that. It is all very doable, it just takes proper planning and coordination.”

At the end of the day Braddy tells couples, “just remember it is your day and do whatever you want to do. It doesn’t matter what they might have seen or what might be in style this year. And finally I tell them not to worry about what others may think.”

Navigating nuptials on a budget

STORY BY ELLEN BR BO

Planning a wedding can be as much about managing a budget as it is about managing expectations. But with the right strategies and insights, you can unveil the celebration you've imagined without breaking the bank. Here are essential tips and tricks for keeping your wedding expenses in check.

Don't assume you know the price of services. Before you start envisioning your day down to the last petal, get an idea of what things cost. Request quotes from multiple vendors early to avoid budgetary surprises and to better understand where you can afford to splurge and where you can scale back. This proactive step prevents budgetary surprises down the line and ensures you can make informed decisions about where to allocate your funds.

"Get a true lay of the land financially before making any big decisions," advised Crystal Moore, the owner of The Penny Pincher Planner. Moore specializes in helping couples maximize their budget throughout the planning process.

Identify what matters most to you and your partner. Determine what elements of your wedding are most important to you. If the dance floor is where you want to shine, prioritize a reputable DJ or band. For aspects that aren't as important, it's okay to seek out cost-effective alternatives or even do

without them altogether.

"If you are on a strict budget for your cake, I would opt for a smaller cake with cupcakes," shared Grace Hedgepeth, the owner of Sugar Plum Baking Company in Greenville, North Carolina. "It cuts the price down and you still get to have cake!"

DIY: Do It Wisely

While DIY options can be cost-effective, Moore warns against projects that could become overwhelming. Choose DIY tasks that can be completed well in advance to avoid last-minute stress.

It's often the little things that add up. The devil is in the details — or in this case, the dollars. From bridal portraits and frames to cake stands and toppers, the accumulation of these "small" expenses can silently inflate your budget. Consider decor rentals or borrowing items from friends or family to keep these costs under control.

Your venue choice can significantly affect your budget. Don't be lured by the sticker price alone; consider what's included and what you'll need to source externally. Use a spreadsheet to tally all associated costs and compare venues on a like-for-like basis.

"Don't set your wedding date until you've budgeted," said Moore.

Save The Dates – Pro Tip:

When ordering save-the-dates and invitations, remember you're sending them per household, not per individual. This common oversight can lead to over-ordering — and overspending. Moore recommends delaying this step until you've secured quotes and have a realistic grasp of your overall budget. This approach helps avoid premature commitments.

Consider hiring a wedding planner.

They often provide organizational tools and insights that can help you stay on budget. Planners are adept at advising on cost-saving measures that you might not have considered. A good planner can not only help you avoid common pitfalls but also provide valuable tools, like budgeting software and stationery guides, that will save you money in the long run.

"Planning within your means doesn't mean compromising on quality—it means investing in the right places and making savvy choices that align with your vision," emphasized Moore.

Effective wedding budgeting isn't about slashing costs haphazardly but making strategic decisions that align your financial reality with your wedding day dreams. Remember, a beautiful wedding is not about how much you spend, but how wisely you allocate your resources to create a day that reflects your love story.

Making it official

It may not be at the top of your wedding day plans, but don't forget about the marriage license. So make sure to have it on your checklist of things to get taken care of. "Couples will need to come to the Register of Deeds office Monday thru Friday between 8:00 am and 3:30 pm to fill out the application," said Carolyn Garris, Beaufort County register of deeds. "They will need a driver's license and social security card as forms of ID. If they don't have a social security card, a W-2 or tax return with their full social will suffice. The application must then be signed by the applicants and the register or deputy register of deeds. The cost is \$60."

Once issued the license is valid for 60 days. It will then need to be completed by the person performing or officiating the wedding.

This will include:

- Date of the marriage
- Place (city, town, township, county)
- Signature of the officiate
- Title of the officiant
- Printed or typed name of the officiate
- Address of the officiate

Both copies of the license must also be signed by two witnesses the day of the wedding.

This includes:

- Their printed or typed names below their signatures
- Printed or typed addresses.

"Make sure that you or someone you thoroughly trust remembers to bring copies of the license to the wedding," said Garris. "If not, you run the risk of having to track down the witnesses to get their signatures and some of them may live out of town. So my advice, don't forget the license."

Both completed and signed copies of the marriage licenses must be returned to the Register of Deeds office by the officiant. A certified copy of the license will be made available at the Register of Deeds office for \$10. It will not be automatically mailed to the couple.

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