

# How do you have a stress-free wedding?

## Hire a wedding planner

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Considering all of the planning, details, decisions, changes in plans, expenses, family debates, conflicts and snafus, can one's wedding day still really be "the happiest day of your life?" Of course, says Andrea Pokorny, who is getting married in October. "It's the happiest day because everything's finally done!"

After hitting snags with prospective vendors for her 100-person event, Pokorny took a cue from a friend who found that by hiring a wedding planner, she could actually enjoy her wedding day. So the bride-to-be enlisted wedding consultant Jennifer Arezzo to handle part of the planning and the "Day-Of" coordination.

Arezzo launched her Ashburn-based service, A Simple Wish, in November 2003. The former corporate events planner long had a passion to run her own business, and found her calling as she planned her own wedding: "I found it so fun!" (Most brides find the planning stressful, exhausting, frustrating, agonizing ... anything but fun.)

Handling affairs for parties that range in size from 25 to 300-plus, Arezzo averages 20 weddings a year. To insure that no detail is missed, Arezzo brought on an assistant wedding planner as her business expanded.

### Many levels of service

Levels of service include full-service planning: "I help make all of the arrangements from A to Z," Arezzo says. "I recommend vendors, accompany the brides to appointments with vendors, provide a list of wedding locations based on their specifications, manage their budgets, help implement their personal style and theme into all aspects of the wedding."

She also provides etiquette guidance; some people, she smiles, even follow it.

Like many wedding planners, she also provides partial service: "The bride started planning, but realized it's too time-consuming or wants direction, I can step in and arrange for vendors. ... Each case is individual."

Very popular is the "Day-Of Coordination" package, for which the wedding consultant provides a full day's service as manager and director, overseeing the plans, putting out fires and making sure everything goes smoothly. "So the bride, groom, parents and attendants can enjoy the day without stress," she says.

Disasters Arezzo has diverted during Days of Coordination include no-show vendors. With an hour remaining until showtime, one couple's chosen florist had not arrived. Arezzo called her own "emergency florist" to bring a bridal bouquet, toss bouquet and alter arrangements.



Jennifer Arezzo, Owner and President of A Simple Wish, launched her business less than two years ago and has planned many weddings at the Belmont Country Club in Ashburn, Va.

Amy Mullarkey/For The Examiner

"Some people in the wedding industry are not reputable and don't follow through on their commitments," Arezzo says. To prevent fires that need putting out, "I work only with the most reputable vendors who have backup plans."

Pokorny appreciates that service. Before hiring Arezzo, the Fairfax resident researched and booked some vendors through Web sites.

### Problem-solving skills

"The hair and makeup agency did a trial run, overcharged my credit card for reserving the date, and was not responsive to my requests," she says. "Jen found someone better and nicer, then canceled the other service."

When Pokorny asked another vendor to reserve a larger reception hall, the vendor resisted and stopped taking her calls. "Within days, Jen managed to work things out and get in writing that we would be able to get a bigger room."

Arezzo helps prevent problems in addition to solving them.

"She comes up with at least one good question we wouldn't have thought to ask," Pokorny says. One

example of creative thinking: Despite requests to keep to a budget, the florist kept recommending additional, extravagant arrangements. "Jen asked, 'What if you and your bridesmaids put your bouquets on the head table during the reception?' She suggested this would make a beautiful display instead of buying additional garlands and other arrangements."

Wedding consultants also assist with organizing the grand affair around the couple's choice of theme.

"One of the most popular themes now is the black and white wedding, which has a simple, elegant feel," she says.

The wedding planner also inevitably functions as diplomat and referee. Often, the mothers and mothers-in-law do live up to the stereotypes; then again, since a wedding is often a family's biggest party, "everyone is so emotionally invested in the planning," Arezzo tries to keep everyone calm and working together instead of at cross-purposes. So often these days, she says, "The couples are paying for the weddings themselves and really want what they want."

Her diplomatic skills typically

come into play on the big day, whether it's to tactfully deter the father of the bride from changing the band's playlist ... to reining in best men whose rambling toasts or ribald garter belt behavior reveal they've had too much to drink.

Some people view the wedding planner as an added expense.

"With the average D.C.-area wedding costing \$45,000, it is hard to have a reasonably priced wedding in this area," Arezzo says.

### Save time, reduce stress

So many couples see wedding planning as one of the first expenses to cut. On the other hand, a good wedding planner can more than make up for the fee by helping couples saving time, reduce stress and avoid costly mistakes. For instance: Many people sign a contract for a location without noticing the cake cutting, corking and other hidden fees that inflate wedding costs.

"I'm often able to negotiate discounts on behalf of the bride or groom, and can persuade [vendors] to provide a la carte services when they normally would not," Arezzo says.

A photographer's \$3,000 wedding package might include services, such as an engagement session, that the couple doesn't need, so Arezzo can negotiate lower fees for her clients.

"Even if clients save only what they pay me — say they pay me \$3,000 and save \$3,000 — they basically are getting my professional recommendations, my time, my industry knowledge and the coordination services" without adding to their wedding budget, explains Arezzo. "It saves them time and stress throughout the process and they break even on the expense."

Some couples opt for limited consultation services. Jenn Tiller and her fiancé planned their October nuptials and chose several vendors local to their Winchester wedding site. To help with invitations, finding a specialist in all-natural cake-making and other details, Tiller purchased a 40-hour package with a planner she met at an area wedding show. The consultant will also assist at the church and reception — so the betrothed couple can remember their big day as one of celebration, not stress.