

2023

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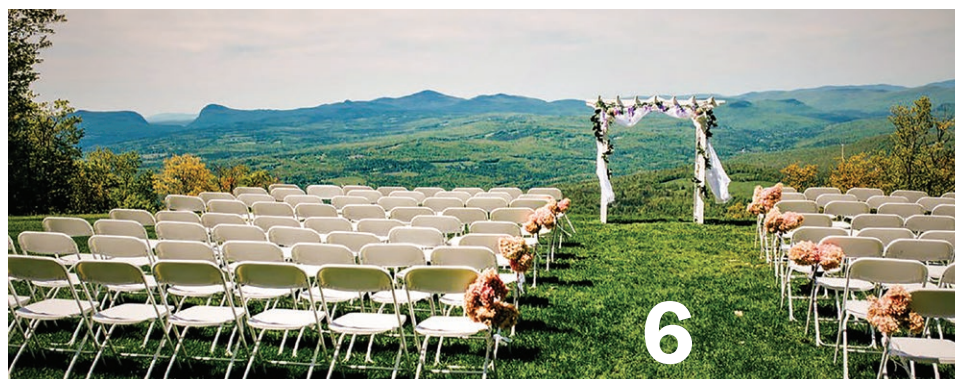
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Cover Couple: Victoria and Matthew Atwood were married on June 25th, 2022.



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Victoria And Matthew Met At A School Dance

After She Broke Up With A 'New Boyfriend,' Matthew 'Came A Callin'!

BY AMY ASH NIXON
Staff Writer

Victoria and Matthew Atwood have one of those stories that's too cute to be true – but it is!

The couple, she's 27 and he's 28, met at Hazen Union's Homecoming Dance in 2009!

Victoria shared, "I was in 8th grade. We became best friends at that point. Eventually, we did date. We were together until my sophomore year in high school! He graduated that year and we went our separate ways for years. We reconnected in 2016 and have been together ever since!"

Matthew was a sophomore at the time, and Victoria was still attending the Walden School, but she was getting ready to transfer to Hazen, and a mutual friend introduced them. That friend, Taylor, was one of Victoria's bridesmaids in their wedding last year.

Though she was in 8th grade, Matthew was not her first crush, confessed Victoria, "I was in-



Victoria and Matthew Atwood were married on June 25th, 2022. (Courtesy Photo)

terested in boys very early!"

"He was dancing with some of the girls that I was dancing with," she recalled of that dance from so long ago. "I ended up dancing with him and we spent the whole time dancing and I didn't

even learn his name until the end."

That fateful dance and meeting was in October, and the pair began dating in March. Victoria had transferred to Hazen as planned not long after they met at the dance, she said.

They dated for a while, but then went their separate ways.

The Reconnect

"During that time of being apart, he went a little wild child, he dated all around," said Victoria with a chuckle. She, on the other hand, ended up dating someone for four years.

"I, on the other hand did another long-term relationship for about four years, and somewhere in that time, Matthew figured out we needed to be back together, he knew it ... he was on it, and he was just kind of biding his time," said Victoria.

She said, "When I broke up with my new boyfriend, he came a callin'!"

After high school, Matthew had gone off to college, then returned to the area after a year. Victoria had remained close with his family, including his much-younger little sister, who is 12 years younger than him. Through the years they were apart, they would bump into each other in the area from time to time.

Shopping for wedding gowns and planning a wedding during the pandemic was not so fun, with restrictions on how many people Victoria was allowed to bring dress shopping, etc. They had to do things a little differently as they embarked on their plans to marry.

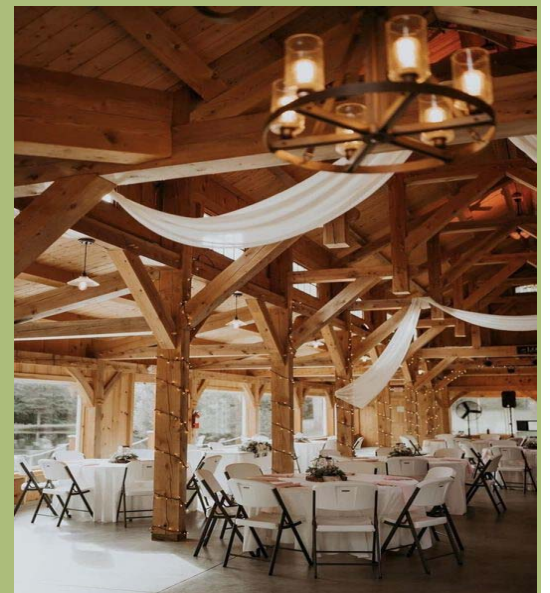
The couple rent a sugar-bush and Matthew

Dance continues on 5

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Dance

Continued from Page 4

ended up proposing to Victoria in the sugar-bush, dropping to both knees because he was wearing snowshoes (they both were!) to offer her the ring and his promise for a lifetime together.

“The proposal was perfect! One of the first decisions we made as a couple was to lease a sugar-bush. We have both always loved sugaring and dream of making our own syrup someday,” shared Victoria, adding, “For now, we just sell the sap from the small woods we lease. We were tapping trees on March 1, 2020, when I needed to replace a chewed drop line. I thought he was reaching into the backpack to get me a new drop-line, but when I turned around, he was down on both knees (because one knee wasn’t an option with snowshoes on), with the most perfect ruby engagement ring!”

The proposal happened at the exact moment in time when word of the new deadly virus

was being reported in far-off countries. Soon, a pandemic would be declared.

Victoria recalled, “We still didn’t really know about COVID at that point but we had already decided on a long engagement.”

The Perfect Location

“The planning was super smooth! We had amazing family and friends there to support us and celebrate each step of the way. I have always wanted a church wedding, in the church I grew up in, so that was an easy decision,” said Victoria.

She said, “The reception was a lot harder to pick a location for! My guest list was 300 people and I did NOT want a curfew! It finally dawned on us that his Uncle Butch’s sugar house was the perfect spot. It’s right next to the woods we lease (where he proposed), and it was Uncle Butch who got us that lease!”

“Plus, it was right up the road from the church. The rest of the planning went perfectly from there. Every part of our big day was absolutely perfect and all that I could have asked

for,” said Victoria. “Of course there were minor details that got missed or messed up but our amazing family and friends made sure that we didn’t notice a thing! I will never be able to thank everyone enough for making sure our dreams came true!”

Victoria’s aunt performed the ceremony for them and her mother’s best friends performed a tying the knot ritual, which Victoria described as “kind of a mini-ceremony within the ceremony.” Her dad arranged for the horse-drawn carriage to bring them to the reception, and Victoria got ready for her wedding at her great-grandmother’s house in Greensboro, a place dear to her heart.

Her main piece of advice for couples planning a wedding: “To not get hung up on the little details. The day comes, you just want to enjoy it, and if you’re nit-picking, it’s not going to be fun.”

Victoria and Matthew Atwood became husband and wife on June 25th, 2022. The couple makes their home in Walden.



Victoria and Matthew Atwood were married on June 25th, 2022, and arrived via horse-drawn buggy. He proposed in their leased sugar-bush, dropping to both knees because he was wearing snowshoes! (Courtesy Photos)



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Full Service, Stunning View Make For Wedded Bliss On Burke Mountain



All is set for an outdoor wedding on Burke Mountain with a view of Willoughby Gap as the backdrop. (Contributed Photo)

BY DANA GRAY
Staff Writer

Partnering all-inclusive celebratory ease with a stunning Northeast Kingdom view makes for wedded bliss on the mountain.

Past couples testify to that in post-event reviews, and future couples are counting on it as the summertime wedding calendar fills up fast and weddings are already booked into 2025.

“Burke was the wedding of my dreams,” said a new spouse in an online review beneath a five-star rating.

Susan Scheibenpflug, director of sales at Burke Mountain Resort, said the mountainside resort with a spectacular view of Willoughby Gap is a popular place for couples to wed; it’s not unusual for the resort to hold three weddings over the course of a single summer weekend. The average number of weddings held per month at Burke Mountain in the summer is eight.

“The great part of our resort is everything is included,” she said. “Everything is in one spot;

the guests come, they park their cars and there’s no need to leave.”

Warmer-months weddings are most popular at the mountain. Couples usually choose an outdoor marriage ceremony location further up the mountain from the resort overlooking the valley below and to the north where Mount Pisgah and Mount Hor frame the Willoughby Gap.

The resort offers indoor wedding space in its large two-story day lodge looking toward the Gap. The reception parties happen in the resort’s grand ballroom, which offers walls of windows on three sides - a feature guests appreciate, said Scheibenpflug. Spacious onsite hotel rooms are available for overnight guests.

She said the resort hosts weddings big and small. “We’ve done elopements and all the way up to the ballroom capacity (220 people).”

Resort staff work with the couples on the plans, and an onsite coordinator provides event support and guidance. The goal, said Scheibenpflug, is to make the Burke Mountain wedding experience as smooth and stress-free as possible.

Burke continues on 7

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ABOVE: The Burke Mountain Resort & Hotel day lodge is set for a an event. LEFT: The Burke Mountain Resort & Hotel day lodge deck features Willoughby Gap as the backdrop. (Contributed Photos)

Burke

Continued from Page 6

For bride “Chelsea C.,” the goal was met. “Working with them to plan and coordinate was extremely easy, helpful, and they were quickly responsive with any questions, requests, or feedback,” she wrote.

Vendors supporting the ceremony and celebration are guided by the coordinator. The resort helps the couple by offering a preferred list of local vendors. The coordination and preparation makes all the difference on wedding day, said Scheibenpflug. “Everything is here for (the couples) when they get here ... they do not have to do anything once they’re here.”

Wedding guests who stay at the hotel can experience mountainside attractions at a discount. Taking advantage of that opportunity recently at a New Year’s Day wedding were guests who hit the slopes on

skis.

Couples from the local area and those from further away book their weddings at Burke. Scheibenpflug said many come from the Boston area, and the resort is seeing a lot of couples from the Burlington area. It’s the beauty of the place that draws them, she said. “People love the views here.”

Costs vary based on the range of services couples choose, the wedding date and the number of people, but Scheibenpflug said the expense is “reasonable.”

“We have a package to fit any reasonable budget,” she said.

Scheibenpflug said weddings are being booked two years out, but there are still summertime weekend openings for this summer.

Consider Burke Mountain for a destination wedding by providing some basic details online at <https://www.skiburke.com/visit-burke/groups/weddings/>

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The Casual Elegance Of Three Ponds Catering



BY TODD WELLINGTON
Staff Writer

Every wedding has a vibe. Three Ponds Catering in Danville is there to help that vibe be memorable, full of yum-ness and delivered with a casual-elegance. “We strive for food that is obviously delicious but also very approachable and then presented in a beautiful way,” said co-owner Anna Berg.

Three Ponds Catering is part of the well-known “Three Ponds” restaurant on Route 2 in Danville Village.

But it’s not a cookie-cutter catering service.

Berg and co-owner Caleb Clark personally oversee the entire operation from food gathering and preparation to serving it all at wedding receptions and rehearsal dinners.

“We’re very much hands-on owners,” said Clark.

They start the catering process with some basic menus and then work with clients to build it into something more personalized for that special day.

“Just to sort of get the conversation going and get an idea of what options are available,”

said Berg. “We sort of start from there, building the menu.”

Three Ponds restaurant is known for its specialty sandwiches. But that’s not all that’s available for weddings.

You can also order buffet-style food layouts.

“We do have a few different set menus that we’ll offer for wedding catering which ranges from your traditional beef, chicken and veggie options and we can also do more of a barbecue style,” said Berg. “We’ll let our clients kind of design the menu. And we can kind of offer whatever folks want.”

Much of the Three Ponds food and ingredients come directly from the local area.

“The vibe of our events - being very Vermont focused - is that our food is also very locally focused,” said Berg. “We’re able to source from so many local farms so that’s definitely a big aspect of the catering that we do.”

Three Ponds catering also offers bartending for weddings and will even rent out their restaurant dining room for special events.

You can connect with Three Ponds Catering at: www.threepondsvt.com, by email at threepondsvt@gmail.com or by phone at 802-227-3300.



Photos Courtesy Of Three Ponds



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All You Need To Know About Flowers For Your Day

BY ROBERT BLECHL
Staff Writer

For weddings, flowers provide countless opportunities for creativity.

One florist in St. Johnsbury highlighted her shop's offerings and what people need to know to prepare for that special day.

Wreaths, corsages, boutonnières, gables, arches, venue decorations, and a near-infinite variety of flowers — the St. Johnsbury-based Artistic Gardens has them all, and more, as well as access to wholesalers across the globe.

Flower varieties depend on the time of year.

"There's a lot because we just don't deal with local stuff," said Artistic Gardens owner Sue Taylor. "You've got things from South America, Ecuador and Colombia, like roses, alstroemerias, and lilies. And California has your larkspur, hydrangea, and ranunculus. There are tulips from Holland, plus other novelty flowers from Holland.



Wedding bouquet. (Photo contributed by Artistic Gardens)

And then there are the regular chrysanthemums, mini-carns, dianthus, and all of that. They come from everywhere. We just call the wholesaler and he gets them for us. A lot of times, I get my roses direct from a grower in Ecuador."

Advance planning is critical.

Those seeking flowers are encouraged to give Taylor about four months to procure them, although she has done it on a much shorter time frame when able to.

"Some people do it six months to almost a year in advance, which is wonderful because you don't have to rush," she said. "Certain times of the year we are really busy, like Valentine's Day and Mother's Day."

Wholesalers can get flowers about two months in advance, as long as they have time to ensure that the grower and broker are lined up.

"Eight weeks is good, four weeks is better," said Taylor. "The more particular you are, the



Preparing flowers for a wedding. (Photo contributed by Artistic Gardens)

Flowers continues on 10

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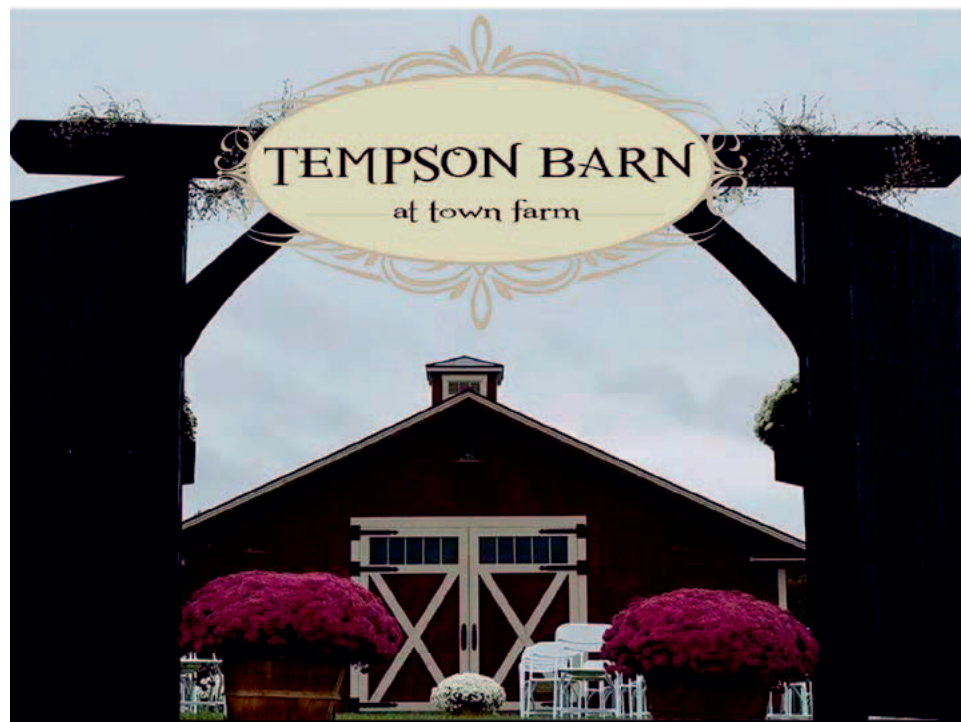


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Flowers

Continued from Page 9

more time you need. If you just want pink roses, not a problem”

But if someone wants a specific variety of pink roses, like rosita vendela, for example, they have to be ordered so they can be cut when they’re ready to be cut.

“When you’re very specific, it’s a lot more work for them,” said Taylor.

And if someone wants to match a flower to a color of clothing, such as a tie, Taylor suggests that they bring in a swatch of the men’s tie or the tie itself and say this is the color they want the roses to match.

“You would send it off to the wholesaler and he would find which rose matches the clothes,” she said.

Artistic Gardens delivers most of its wedding flowers usually within an hour’s drive or less, in a big circle south to Fairlee and north to Newport and east to the Whitefield area.

While weddings during the Thanksgiving, Christmas, and

New Year’s holiday seasons were more common years ago, today the high season for when Taylor’s business does the most weddings is summer, and extending from late spring to late autumn.

“We go right into late fall, but then the holiday season and early spring is kind of quiet,” said Taylor.

Her business does between 17 and 23 weddings a year, about one a week during the season.

She finds that most people like the outdoor venues and said the Northeast Kingdom and North Country, with their views, have some gorgeous outdoor weddings.

“It’s a great place to get married up here, that’s for sure,” said Taylor. “And it’s a lot more affordable than other areas. Girls coming up from Massachusetts and Connecticut are just astounded we are so less expensive, the flowers, the reception, the meals, everything. It’s just so much more affordable for them.”

Venues run the gamut and include the Tempson Barn in

Lyndonville, the Mountain View Grand in Whitefield, and a number in Sugar Hill.

“There’s some nice places,” said Taylor. “Some are really pretty and have nice views.”

Like flowers, choosing a venue has near-unlimited opportunities for creativity, and in addition to the popular places, brides and grooms have the freedom to get off the beaten path.

“They tell you to think outside of the box to find spots for weddings,” said Taylor. “It’s amazing what people do sometimes. I’m really impressed.”

Some local flowers shops:
* All About Flowers, St. Johnsbury: 802-748-5656, www.allaboutflowersvt.com.

* Artistic Gardens, St. Johnsbury: 802-748-5646, staylor@artisticgardens.com.

* Mountain Roots Farm, Bethlehem: 603-686-0296, mountainrootsfarm@gmail.com.

* Cherry Blossom Floral Design, Littleton: 603-444-1015, info@cherryblossomfloral.com.

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A bride carries her Lily of the Valley bouquet before her wedding. (Photo contributed by Artistic Gardens)

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Wedding bouquets. (Photo contributed by Artistic Gardens)

Kingdom Farm Lodge Offers An Authentic, Unique Wedding Experience

BY PAUL HAYES
Staff Writer

EAST BURKE — The Kingdom Farm Lodge offers a special Vermont wedding experience.

Unique and authentic, the venue is a converted farmhouse and post-and-beam barn set in the heart of the beautiful Northeast Kingdom, with a sweeping view of Burke Mountain and the pastoral countryside.

“If you love the idyllic Vermont scenery, serenity and sunsets, The Kingdom Farm Lodge is the best option,” said co-owner Jessi Hudson.

Located close by the Kingdom Trails Association mountain bike trail network, and in close proximity to some of the best outdoor recreation in New England, Kingdom Farm Lodge is an ideal place for hikers, bikers, climbers, kayakers, skiers, and more to exchange vows.

“If you’re an outdoor enthusiast or mountain biker looking for the ideal nuptial location, this venue is perfect,” Hudson said. “The Lodge has a history of catering to mountain bikers and is located along the KTA trail system for an epic pre and post wedding ride. Kingdom Farm offers a variety of wedding packages — from simple and affordable options to a complete venue with a full weekend stay with enough lodging for family and friends.”

The one-time farm has been in Hudson’s family for over a century.

Her great-grandparents purchased the homestead in 1913 and her grandfather was born there in 1920. He raised livestock for decades and lived on the site his entire life, until his death in 2008.

Hudson took over the property in 2013.

It’s a special place for her, especially the 200-year-old cattle barn that was converted into an eight-room lodge.

“We raised cattle until my teenage years when my grandfather became too old to continue farming. I spent my childhood both playing and working in that barn and the building is very sentimental to me,” she said.

She and her husband, Eric, have deep roots in the region.

Both of their families have been in Vermont for over six generations, both were born and raised in the area (Eric in Concord), and both have forged strong personal and professional relationships locally (Jessi is the Social Emotional Learning Coordinator at Waterford School, Eric is a self-employed builder).

They also have a passion for mountain biking and business.

Fueled by those twin interests and a love for the Northeast Kingdom, they renovated the cattle barn and co-founded the Kingdom Farm Lodge to host visiting Kingdom Trails cyclists.

“Originally, I had a vision of creating a hostel

for mountain bikers coming to the area. The feedback that I received showed that the NEK wasn’t quite ready for that sort of establishment and so we decided to change our business plan to create a community style Lodging experience instead. That idea was embraced. After all, the guests were all going to be there for the same reason and we were correct in thinking that they would enjoy the camaraderie of other mountain bikers,” Hudson said.

In a short time, Kingdom Farm Lodge established itself as part of the local outdoor recreation and mountain biking economy.

“The popularity of Kingdom Trails is our life line. The creation of the mountain bike trails has enhanced tourism in the area and provided some of us locals with a creative form of income,” Hudson said.

Kingdom Farm Lodge was hit hard by the pandemic.

The business limped through 2020 and 2021 at 40 percent capacity. Because it had no paid employees, it wasn’t eligible for COVID relief funds.

Then, when pandemic restrictions eased, inflation hit.

“I hadn’t gotten back on my feet after COVID when prices of goods skyrocketed. It became obvious that it was unrealistic to carry on as I had been. It was obvious that prices needed to increase significantly and/or the business model needed to change,” Hudson said.

Faced with those challenges, the business evolved.

Hudson and her husband have made improvements and positioned Kingdom Farm Lodge as a unique wedding venue.

“The first wedding that we hosted was actually that of our daughter’s. It turned out beautifully but we have definitely learned a lot and made changes since then,” Hudson said. “We created a large grassy area, large enough for any size wedding tent, and acquired an ample parking area. We also renovated the main level of the Horse Barn into a lovely cocktail area called the Horse Trough. The numerous weddings that we’ve hosted since, have been great successes and have convinced us that KFL is a wedding venue that will be coveted by others in the future.”

Kingdom Farm Lodge will continue to serve outdoor enthusiasts as well, with single rooms available for a two-night minimum, but the Hudsons see growth potential in weddings, and believe they can offer couples a magical experience.

“We have been running solely as an inn for the last nine years while hosting an average of one wedding per year. Due to guest feedback and positive reviews, we really feel as though we have a special [wedding] venue at Kingdom

Farm continues on 15



Kingdom Farm Lodge (Courtesy Photo)

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A Couple Happily Tricked Into Matchmaking Snare

**Bride's Advice:
Delegate, And Keep
Wedding Party Small**

BY AMY ASH NIXON
Staff Writer

Sara and Jeremy Broe didn't meet by accident. Good friends of the couple got up to some matchmaking, and ended hosting a dinner party where the pair met without knowing the table was set with more than just the food.

"We were offered to be set up, and we both were like, 'Oh no, we're not interested in being set up,'" Sara shared about how the couple - who live on Jeremy's family's property at the Vermont Reindeer Farm - first met one another.

She said, "We were invited to dinner under the guise that it was just going to be my friend and her fiancé."

"He also got tricked into going over for dinner!"

Sara's friend's intuition about Jeremy being the guy for her turned out to be spot-on.

"We ended up being there and after that we made plans and probably against my better judgment, I let him take me to his family's farm ... at night ... in the woods ... in the dark!" Sara shared. She said she already knew that Jeremy was a teacher at the local high school's building trades program, and his reputation for being a good guy worth getting to know preceded him; she wasn't worried about him being a serial killer despite the ominous setting and time of day for their first solo date, she shared with a laugh!

Sara said, "I figured I was in safe hands since

we were set up by friends," plus, knowing his responsible job in the community as a respected teacher, she said, "he can't be a serial killer," she thought. She soon learned the couple, who each came into the relationship with a child from previous relationships, shared values and things quickly became serious.

Joining Families

Sara and Jeremy now have three children, including Mason, 13, Lenyx, 8, and the son they now have together, their youngest, 2-year-old Warren, who was born on Sara's birthday.

On Warren's first birthday, just before the clock struck midnight (Sara has never really liked her own birthday but now that she shares it with her son, it's more special, she shared), Jeremy finally got around to proposing to her, she said. It was 11:58 p.m. when he proposed.

The couple met in the summer of 2017 and were married in June of 2022.

"It took him only five years to propose!" said Sara. She said when Jeremy invited her to move in with him, onto the Broe family land that has been in his family for generations, giving up her little apartment, she was hesitant, in case "things go south," but they did not.

Sara, who is 27, and Jeremy, who will be 38 in February, have made a life together that they love, and are raising three beautiful kids together, she shared.

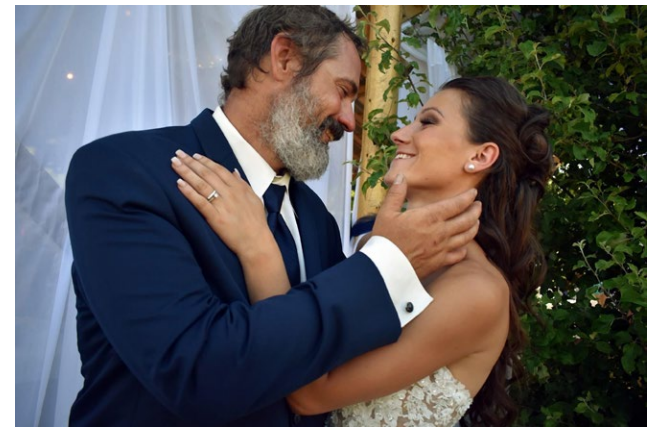
Of Jeremy's strike of midnight proposal on her 25th birthday, she said, "It was not anything big or exaggerated, but it was sweet, and he's got very good taste in jewelry!"

Planning The Ceremony

The couple were married on the Broe family land, upon which her in-laws operate the beloved Vermont Reindeer Farm. She said her mother-in-



ABOVE: Their beautiful kids. Mason (13) trying his best with the sun blinding him. Warren (2) mid-sneeze. Lenyx (8) the only time she wasn't interested in having her picture done. RIGHT: Sara and Jeremy Broe on their wedding day; this is one of their favorite photos captured by the photographer. (Courtesy Photos)



Match continues on 13

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Match

Continued from Page 12

law, Pauline Broe, was incredibly helpful with the wedding planning, tending to all the edibles, which was a huge contribution. Other family and friends also assisted the couple with pieces of the planning, and Sara's main advice to couples planning a wedding is this one word: delegate.

Jeremy built a pavilion for shade for the big day, and it was good he had, it was a very hot day, June 25, 2022.

"I always wanted to be a June bride," said Sara, saying they chose a date in late June so that they would be safely past any snow day makeups for the kids' school schedules, as well as Jeremy's as a teacher.

She had given Jeremy a choice of June 18 or 25 and immediately chose the 25th; the couple are big softball players and his number is 52, and hers is the reverse of her husband's numbers, 25, she said. Jeremy chose the 25th because of that, saying, "I'll be able to remember it easier!"

The couple had a guest list that topped 300, and not everyone could make it, but many did, with lots of people traveling far to attend their special day.

"We had beautiful people surrounding us," shared Sara, "We had so many friends and family come."

The bride and groom each had 10 attendants! "A softball team's worth, I like to say!" said Sara. She has four sisters who she wanted to be part of her bridal party and they were. Her brother Tyler also was with the family at the wedding, and as fate had it, he later passed away unexpectedly. Her wedding was the last day she saw him, sadly.

Sara said she comes from a "split home," where she has two step parents, and having all of her family with her on her special day was really important, "I looked forward to having all of my family surrounding me in the same spot."

"It was crazy planning, I don't know if I'll want to plan another wedding ever!" said Sara, "but I absolutely loved the outcome!"

The Little Details

The couple promised one another ahead of time that they would be polite when it came to feeding each other their first bite of their vanilla and strawberry filled wedding cake. "I was like, 'Oh, be careful with a white wedding dress!' We had come to the agreement that neither of us would smooch cake into each other's face, none in his beard and none on my freshly-applied makeup!"

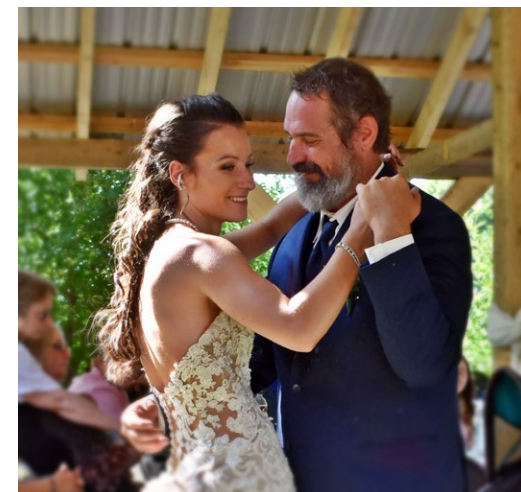
"I loved my dress!" shared Sara. "We had a lot of people that helped and everything before ... it really showed us how many loved ones we have surrounding us."

Of Sara's advice to delegate, she said, "There are so many more details that you think when you're getting into it. When you think you have accomplished something, you're like, 'oh, there are these five more things that I need to do ...' My mother-in-law was gracious to take over the food, everything that went into people's mouths, we had a big wedding party that helped with some of the DIY stuff. Delegating is the biggest one," she said of her advice to couples now in the throes of planning weddings. "Don't expect everything to be perfect. If you go into it thinking everything is going to be perfect, you're going to be disappointed."

One thing she learned is that keeping your wedding party smaller than a softball team might also be wise. "Keep your wedding party small," she suggests. "It was a beautiful day, there are lots of happy faces in the pictures ... a lot of people stepped up and helped pull it off."



ABOVE: Left to right: Groomsmen: Jeremy Brainard, Jesse Ranslow, Bo Naramore, Jeff Charland, Derek Charland, Mike Quiron, Justin Broe, John Broe, Travis Rollins. Ring bearer: Mason Jeremy and Sara (bride and groom). Flower girls Emily and Lenyx. Bridesmaids: Kassy Harmon, Aliza Lafontaine, Jayde Furlow, Katie Furlow, Sam Stanhope, Brooke Whittemore, Courtney Columbia, Mariah Irons, Lisandra Santiago. RIGHT: Sara and Jeremy Broe's first dance on their wedding day last year. (Courtesy Photos)



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UCC: A One-Stop-Shop Wedding Venue

BY KEVIN DOYON
Staff Writer

ST. JOHNSBURY — The Costco of wedding venues?

That's the way Reverend Andrew Ponder Williams jokingly described the United Community Church's wedding offerings; deeming the church as a "one-stop-shop" that includes clergy, staff, sanctuary, music and in-house catering.

Unlike Costco, where a membership is needed, the UCC prides itself on being available and inclusive to all couples — meaning those looking to tie the knot at UCC do not need to be members of the church.

"I think the thing that is very unique is that we are welcome and open to anyone," Administrative Assistant Erika Thompson said. "We're not like some churches where you have to be a member to be married here. You don't have to convert or anything like that. A lot of people worry when they see church tied into a title, but that's not the case here. You don't have to be affiliated with this religion. I think that is very unique."

"That's probably the most notable thing, is that you don't need to be a member to have it here," added Administrative Assistant Barbara Connelly, who is also the Director of Music, Organist and Choir Director.

The large, gray stone church on St. Johnsbury's Main Street is nearly impossible to miss when passing by which helps draw initial interest.

"Most of the time when someone calls, it is because they have seen the outside of the church and they want to know if having their wedding here is possible," Connelly said.

While most know of its magnitude and elegance from an outer view, those at the UCC believe the magnificence inside the walls plays just as a prominent role in making the weddings magical.

"It is an unusual space in Vermont in terms of grandeur and architectural style," Williams said. "It's Victorian, so it is much

more a cathedral-like space; much more like a kind of royal wedding than your typical white steeple Vermont — it's different, it's unusual.

"If you want a classic, grand wedding in Vermont or Northern New Hampshire this would be the place."

Thompson added that couples could also choose an alternative route if looking to take their special day in a more mellow direction.

"It could also be very simple and have a small crowd," she said. "We had one couple with only a few people and it was very simple."

Inside the church, there are many rows of seating as well as a balcony — the space can seat in the ballpark of 500 when both are used. Stained glass windows and a healthy amount of natural sunlight also fill the sanctuary. Bridal parties in the past have decorated on the pews and arranged flowers throughout.

It was agreed upon that the first wedding at the United Community Church was likely held in 1825.

The church only hosted a handful of weddings in 2022. With COVID precautions still lingering, they also hosted outside weddings which were a huge success. Now, couples are given the choice whether they would like to use the church for an indoor or outdoor ceremony.

Many couples also use the sanctuary as a place to take their engagement photos, which is an option regardless if they are getting married there. Other hosted events have included bridal showers and Sweet Sixteens.

"There is a great deal of venue space available all throughout that fits a lot of needs in here," Chef Josh Lyford said. "We've got the parlor, the sanctuary — there's everything."

The parlor is typically reserved for the bride's preparation, which allows her not to be seen leading up to the start of the ceremony.

"We are Vermont's cathedral and are the largest church you're going to find up in this area," Lyford continued. "We could probably hold three weddings here at a time; and the outdoors is beautiful."

Lyford handles the catering aspect of the church's weddings and takes on a variety of requests for menu options. While his services are optional, the church has a full kitchen and is capable of staffing help when needed, whether that be to serve or cook. One important thing to note, is that alcohol and smoking are prohibited on the



The United Community Church in St. Johnsbury. (Photo by Kevin Doyon)

property.

The ceremony itself is something Williams also attempts to gear towards each couples' specific wants and needs. He will have several meetings beforehand in order to get to know them, hear what they envision and take on any special requests.

"We definitely work with each couple," Williams said. "We have a ceremony order in our tradition but it's not rigid and couples would be able to customize. Some of that customization would have to be on their end, if they want to do something super elaborate."

Williams can legally and religiously officiate a ceremony and uses the United Church of Christ ceremony as the basis. After that, he encourages the couple to make it their own however they'd like; whether that be anything from a family member reading a passage or certain other people participating in the ceremony in some way.

"We're not going to tell them their time is up or they have to do this or that only and in that order," he said. "It's their day."

Another officiant can also be used if preferred.

Connelly is available to handle all music requests or, again, the couples can hire an outside option. Connelly is the church's organist and pianist. She describes the UCC's organ as "loud and proud." The grand instrument is estimated to be the largest of its kind north of Boston.

After the ceremony, the downstairs space is available for

guests to celebrate. A band or DJ can be hired and there is plenty of room for people to socialize and enjoy themselves.

Interested couples can reach out to the United Community Church to gain more information on having their wedding held at the location. Once contacted, they can go over their options, arrange a date and discuss all the pieces and details that they want to be included. The staff added that they could likely plan, organize and arrange a wedding in a month's time if a couple was looking to get married right away.

The church charges \$275 for use of the sanctuary and \$325 during the heating season (November through April) — use of the space for reception is not included in that fee amount. The pastor fee is \$150, organist fee is \$125 and the custodian fee is \$75. Church members do not have to pay the building and pastor fees.



An inside look of the United Community Church in St. Johnsbury. (Photo by Kevin Doyon)

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Second Time Around Feels Just Right For Julie And Kevin Mitchell

Friends For Six Years - An Easy Decision 'Second Time Around'

BY AMY ASH NIXON
Staff Writer

Julie and Kevin Mitchell met six years ago, when their boys were in the same PreK class together at the St. Johnsbury School.

"Our boys are the same age, and were in the same PreK class, so I knew Kevin as a fun dad that was always interacting with the kids ... he was the fun dad who was always chasing and playing with the kids; he always stood out," said Julie.

He was a single dad and she was married at the time and a mom of two.

Julie said, "We always said 'hi,' in passing throughout the years and finally connected last December," Julie said.

She and her husband had divorced, and Kevin noticed that her relationship status on social media had changed. He reached out.

After a handful of years of bumping into each other, "You see each other at Applebees or Anthony's, and you say 'hello,' throughout the years, we were friends on Facebook," Julie and Kevin met outside of their roles as parents and friends, and began talking.

"He noticed that my marriage ended (on social media) and we started talking to each other, quickly getting to know each other and we realized our long-term plans were very similar," said Julie. They both have family members living in the south and hope to move south once their kids are out of school.

She said, "We were doing the whole single parent thing ourselves." "When you're a little bit older, especially the second time around, you have a better understanding of what you're looking for and what you're not looking for," said Julie of how fast things with Kevin moved forward – and how right it felt.

She said, "We knew really quickly there's something here and we really wanted to explore that."

"Once our kids started hanging out with us it just felt so natural," said Julie. Her cousin had told her that when you meet the right person there will be something about them that stands out, that there was going to be one person she would find.

"I realized three months into it, I just realized it was him, it felt like home, and I've never had that feeling when I felt like I was home with someone," said Julie. "It was never awkward."

Natalie, her pre-teen daughter "immediately really just loved Kevin, she said, 'He's so nice mom you need to give him a chance.'"

"It just felt like from the very beginning like family," said Julie.

The Proposal

Over the summer, the family traveled to Ohio for Kevin to meet her family on an annual family trip where her family convenes every year.

"He had the chance to really get to know my parents and my sister, and they're super cautious about me, especially the second time around, they don't want me getting hurt," said Julie. "They could just identify, *alright, everything she's told us on the phone, it's really true!*"

Julie went on, "They saw exactly what I saw, and in that time down there, him and my dad had lunch and he asked my dad permission to propose that was in July."

"He didn't propose until September," on a planned family photo shoot on Darling Hill Road in Lyndonville. "At one point he got down on one knee and (Holly, Julie's friend and the photographer) was snapping the pictures, and the kids were all around behind us. We had already looked at rings." Julie is 41 and Kevin is 48.

Natalie went with Kevin to pick out the ring, said Julie, and she knew he was planning to propose that day on Darling Hill.

Small Wedding, Future Reception

"We originally were going to do the wedding in June of this year, but we both lived separate and we both had morals about not living together until we got married," said Julie. "We wanted it to be official, so we could house-hunt and so we could live in one place."

She said, "I already did a great big church wedding," and she was happy with something intimate and with just a handful of friends and family. They got married Dec. 1 at the Lyndon Outing Club. Julie's family were in attendance via Zoom, she said. A friend married them and they had the Outing Club for two hours.

Julie's friends have begun a business called Green Mountain Moments, and they are helping the couple to plan a reception, also at the Outing Club, for June, for a celebration with many more friends and



Julie and Kevin Mitchell were married on Dec. 1, 2022



Julie and Kevin Mitchell are planning a larger reception for everyone to celebrate in June at the same venue. Their marriage welcomes the couples three children from their previous marriages. (Courtesy Photos)

Farm

Continued from Page 11

Farm Lodge and would like to expand on it," Hudson said.

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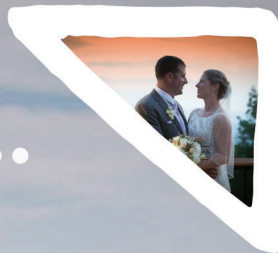


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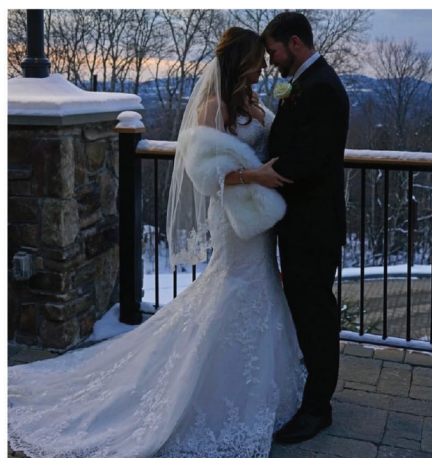
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