

Charitable Wedding News

A forum connecting weddings, communities, and philanthropy

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Charitable Wedding News is sponsored by the I Do Foundation. Comments or written contributions can be sent to Eric Colchamiro, editor, at Eric@IDoFoundation.org, www.IDoFoundation.org.

Weddings for Good... and Gifts Gone Bad!

The I Do Foundation is asking engaged and recently-married couples to share their most creative ideas about giving back to charity through their weddings. And just for fun, the I Do Foundation is also collecting a list of "you shouldn't have" gifts – gifts where it's the thought that counts, but you just have to wonder what the giver was thinking.

Submit entries online at <http://www.idofoundation.org/welcome/contest/> before March 31, 2004.

1) In Focus: *A La Carte* – Socially Conscious Food and Catering Options

With forty percent of the average wedding budget being spent on food, couples and wedding professionals alike are well aware of the importance of catering decisions. With such a large amount of money going towards these costs, thoughtful choices about food can make a big impact.

Here are some ideas about socially conscious approaches to wedding catering:

Go Organic – Good for the environment, organic foods are becoming a common menu choice among engaged couples and many caterers are willing to provide organic options. Organic farming means that farming methods avoid the use of harmful chemicals that can contaminate ground water and rainwater, and seek to maintain the natural ecological balance of the lands and animals used. The term "certified organic" means that a product meets the USDA's Organic Rule, which regulates the management and production of organic products. Organic foods have gained such popularity among health-conscious consumers that many caterers now advertise their use of organic products as a way to

attract couples. For more information about organic farming, please visit the Organic Farming Research Foundation (www.ofrf.org), or Whole Foods Market (www.wholefoodsmarket.com/issues), the nation's largest purveyor of organic foods.

Community Caterers – High quality catering companies that also provide training for homeless and unemployed adults are popping up all over the country. Many food rescue programs also run catering businesses that rival some of the top for-profit caterers. Engaged couples interested in working with these organizations can expect the same quality of food and service, while knowing that a large portion of their wedding budget is going to support nonprofits that help under-employed adults gain job skills. Kitchens INC (www.kitchensinc.org) - Kitchens In National Cooperation - lists community kitchens around the country, many of whom offer catering services for weddings and other events.

Good Fish, Bad Fish – Over-fishing, environmentally damaging fishing practices, and "bycatch"- aquatic animals caught along with the fish - are some of the reasons why all fish meals are not equally healthy for the earth. Some fish have become endangered species because of their popularity on menus, while others are so difficult to catch that their natural habitats are wrecked in the process. The Monterey Bay Aquarium (www.mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp) maintains a list of popular fish choices, and provides information about which are the best and worst to choose for dinner. For example, tilapia is a great choice because it is mostly farm-raised, thereby avoiding habitat damage and over-fishing. Monkfish, on the other hand, has seen its numbers severely diminished by over-fishing and the methods used to catch this bottom dweller are damaging to the ocean floor.

In Season and On Location – Caterers and chefs often recommend foods that are in season and local for freshness and quality, but this recommendation also saves on the packaging and transportation needed to import foods out of season or from far away. This option is both great for the environment and the couple's budget. To find out more about local produce, the Farmers Market Online provides information on the origin and shipping methods used for over 60 varieties of fruits, vegetables, nuts, herbs, and legumes: www.farmersmarketonline.com/Inseason.htm. The agricultural and consumer services departments of many local governments offer listings of local produce available by season, such as the New Jersey Department of Agriculture (www.state.nj.us/jerseyfresh/searches/availability.htm). The simplest way for couples to discover local seasonal produce, however, is to visit a farmers market in their area. The USDA and the Agricultural Marketing Service have an online database of farmers markets in every state: www.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/map.htm

Don't Forget To Donate- When the reception is over, couples can donate leftovers to a food rescue program. Local food rescue programs will pick up leftovers from the wedding reception, and deliver them to a homeless shelter the same day. For more information and to locate a local food rescue program, please visit America's Second Harvest (www.secondharvest.org).

2) Industry Leader: Natalie Alwen Jayroe, Director of Kitchens In National Cooperation

The following is a brief interview with Natalie Alwen Jayroe, Director of Kitchens In National Cooperation (Kitchens INC). Kitchens INC, founded in 2000, is a national project of the Washington D.C. Central Kitchen. The organization works to find innovative ways to end hunger by training people with barriers to employment and helping them gain self-sufficiency. The D.C. Central Kitchen was one of the first hunger organizations to launch a for-profit catering venture, Fresh Start Catering. Nationally, the proceeds from catering companies such as these support the programming of their parent groups, leading to increased stability for nonprofits working on the frontline of hunger.

CWN: For those who are not familiar with your organization, give our readers an introduction to what Kitchens INC does.

NAJ: Kitchens INC is the national organization, with more than 80 member groups, that helps underserved or disenfranchised populations. With member groups like Fresh Start DC, we have entities that train out-of-work or homeless individuals as caterers; many have also started up individual restaurants. Our website also lists the increasing number of groups that offer catering services.

CWN: Food is a vital part of weddings. I'm sure people often ask you how the quality of food and service from organizations such as the members of Kitchen INC compares to that of other caterers. What should wedding planners and couples know about this option?

NAJ: For weddings or other large events, couples should treat and expect everything that they would from a more traditional group; they will be amazed at the product. All of the food is purchased, and each graduate who works in the catering groups are specifically trained in food safety and the most advanced culinary techniques. Ask for a proposal, and judge it accordingly. We will be as good if not better than any other caterer.

CWN: In closing, if a couple is looking to incorporate a catering group or simply make effective use of the food from their wedding, why should they do it?

NAJ: When a couple chooses a group like Fresh Start Catering, the result is quality food and an immense opportunity to do positive. Thirty percent of the food in this country goes to waste. Our caterers stake their lives on being successful. If you utilize one of our catering groups, then you help further a person's self-fulfillment. And even if people just donate their food to local organizations, it helps seniors who might otherwise have to choose between food and medicine.

For more information about Kitchens In National Cooperation and its member groups, visit <http://www.kitchensinc.org>.

3) Links: Organic Trade Association

To find out more about organic farming, the Organic Trade Association (OTA) is a

wonderful resource as the main business association for the organic industry in North America. "OTA's mission is to encourage global sustainability through promoting and protecting the growth of diverse organic trade." OTA's website also offers Organic Pages online—a searchable organic products directory—for couples who want to shop organic for everything from appetizers to wine.

For more information, please visit www.ota.com.

4) Nonprofit Spotlight: Bread and Butter Café Community Kitchen

Savannah's Bread & Butter Café is a non-profit restaurant that serves as a permanent home for Community Kitchen, a culinary and life-skills training program for adults with significant barriers to employment. Chef/Trainer Mike Wilson teaches the French method of food preparation each quarter to a new class of 15 students. Graduates from the Community Kitchen obtain career opportunities in the city's best kitchens with its top-rated chefs, thanks to the support of the hospitality industry. The Bread & Butter Café meets its goal to end hunger by training men and women to cook and to sell their new creations.

For more information on the Bread and Butter Café Community Kitchen, see: <http://www.helpendhunger.org>

5) Couple Profile: Julia Howell-Barrios and Marco Davis

With charitable work at the core of their lives, Marco Davis and Julia Howell-Barrios of Washington, DC, knew that a socially conscious wedding was important to them. The couple met at a non-profit conference and both work for non-profit organizations, so it was no surprise that Julia and Marcos wanted a wedding that reflected their values. As their 300 guests enjoyed a celebration punctuated by Latin music and traditions, they dined on food prepared by Fresh Start Catering, a group affiliated with the D.C. Central Kitchen.

"When you're spending all that money for a wedding, I think it's essential to consider how you can benefit others," Marco said. "I think that in working with the I Do Foundation and Fresh Start Catering, we didn't forgo anything; we simply did more with what we were already doing."

Julia and Marco said that they viewed their use of the D.C. Central Kitchen and the I Do Foundation as easy and practical ways to have socially conscious aspects inconspicuously incorporated in their wedding experience.

Julia commented: "Giving to charity doesn't require lots of money, and you may have not even considered it, but it's just really easy to do." To which Marco added, "It's just a fabulous way to do good 'in addition to,' and not 'instead of' during your wedding."

6) Recent Press about Charitable Weddings

January 1, 2004 Detroit Free Press

"For Some, Charity Begins at the Wedding" *Meredith Moss*

http://www.freep.com/features/living/wed1_20040101.htm

March 2, 2004 The Wall Street Journal

"Alternative Gift Registries" *Ian Mount*

"Greenwish.com caters to a bride and groom's craven side--they can request gifts of cash or stock that are then deposited into a bank or brokerage account. If all this materialism leaves you cold, JustGive.org lets people give to any of about 850,000 charities in your name."

I Do Foundation

The I Do Foundation is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC, whose mission is to bring a charitable focus to special life events. The Foundation helps engaged couples raise charitable wedding donations through three channels:

Gift Registry: When couples register with our partners—including Target, Linens 'N Things and Amazon.com—up to 8% of all spending is donated.

Travel: The I Do Foundation's partner, Carlson Wagonlit Travel, donates 5% of all honeymoon packages and 4% of guest hotel lodging purchases.

Donation Registry: With our flexible Donation Registry, guests can make a donation directly to charity in place of, or in addition to, traditional gifts.

Favors For Charity: Instead of the usual trinkets or Jordan almonds, couples can make a donation in honor of their guests to their favorite charity. The I Do Foundation provides place cards that couples can use to inform guests of the donation.

To learn more, visit www.idofoundation.org or contact info@idofoundation.org.

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