



Guests retrieved their seating assignments from trays that were lined with grass and encircled with stones.

# Whatever Happened to Lori Hemphill?

With 25 years of experience in the food and beverage industry, a degree in art from Millersville University and a remodeled carriage house in Millersville to serve as her office, Lori Hemphill is setting her sights on event planning. She will unveil *The Perfect Plan* by Lori Hemphill this spring.

by Sue Long  
photography Donna Wilcox



One of the stations for the reception employed an Asian theme that was accented with tropical flowers and bold serving pieces.

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**Lori says** that a day seldom goes by without someone telling her they miss ChefsCargot, the deli restaurant/catering firm she co-owned with Brad Charles. "It's been nine years!" she exclaims. Lori explains that she and Brad closed the business for the sake of their families. "Working 14 hours a day, six days a week takes its toll on everyone," she admits. Still, it wasn't easy to walk away. "I mourned ChefsCargot's closing for two years," she notes. Brad, by the way, is happily working with furniture maker Joe DeLuca.

Lori stayed involved in the industry by going to work for Claudia Himes at Special Occasions, a linens rental company in Lancaster. "I helped her launch Queen Street Linens," Lori says of Special Occasions' sister company through which clients can purchase custom linens. The job also provided her with the opportunity to work directly with the various managers of the hotels that were clients of the company.

Lori's next stop was the Hamilton Club, where she was the director of catering for five years. "I loved that job because it allowed me to be creative," she says, alluding to the theme parties she planned for the members' enjoyment, as well as the wedding receptions and other special events that dotted the calendar. She also got to work with Claudia again, as the club made the decision to upgrade its linens and purchase a quantity through Queen Street Linens.

Lori left the Hamilton Club in order to deal with the declining health and, ultimately, the deaths of both her mother and mother-in-law. "I needed some time to deal with that," she explains. When she returned to work, her focus was on yet another aspect of the food industry – the corporate side. "As retail director, I helped F&M open the five satellite restaurants that are on campus," she recounts.

Last year, Lori decided it was time to once again become a business owner. She chose to focus on wedding and event planning, hence the name The Perfect Plan. "I've been helping to plan weddings for 25 years," she says. (She's a

member of the Association of Bridal Consultants and the National Association of Catering Executives.) "I think there's value in my experience and the contacts I've made. I think my strength lies in the fact that I truly understand what it takes behind the scenes to plan a special event. Vendors appreciate working with someone like that."

Lori admits that wedding planners often get a bad rep. "They're portrayed as being difficult or worse, as someone who wants complete control. I view a planner's job as guiding the ship – I want to work with vendors and not against them."

Lori is putting the finishing touches on a house in Millersville that she's owned since her college days. The one-time carriage house will serve two purposes – it will function as both her office and as an idea center. "I'll have a year-round bridal show in place," she says of her plans. "Couples can visit while they're in the process of making their plans," she explains.

Lori's plans include featuring various vendors who will be invited to set up displays in the house for a set period of time. Brochures from vendors will also be made available and custom linens will be for sale. In addition, Lori will be displaying set tables in various color themes, entertaining ideas, vintage jewelry pieces and invitation ideas.

She's also excited to be a member of a community in which other wedding-driven businesses are located. "Millersville is becoming the new wedding destination," she points out, referring to such businesses as Weddings by Paulette (which is celebrating its 30th anniversary), Flowers by Paulette and Bella Manse.

Lori encourages couples to first answer two questions before they begin to design their weddings. "I want to know what they envision and what they most want to remember," she remarks. "Once they know their goals, they have a clearer idea of the kind of wedding they want."

In her role as a planner, Lori will be offering several packages to bridal cou-

ples, all of which can be customized to reflect her opinion that all weddings are unique. "A wedding is one of the biggest investments you'll make," she says, referring to both the monetary and time commitments that are devoted to such events. "For all the months of planning, that special day goes by so fast. If you're under pressure, you won't be able to enjoy the process or the event itself. My goal is to help a couple thoroughly enjoy and savor each moment of their big day."

The packages cover the gamut of services, including visiting vendors with clients, assisting them in making decisions, serving as a liaison between the bride and the vendors, going over contracts, arranging for guest accommodations, coordinating the rehearsal and being on-site during the wedding and reception. "The week of the wedding is when couples really need help. All the details can unhinge a bride," Lori explains. "A planner can help them take care of the little things."

Lori also finds that some people are just "overwhelmed and need some advice in comparing apples to oranges." Hence, she'll be offering consulting sessions that vary in length and cost.

Lori maintains that the need for event planning in Lancaster has arrived. "Not only for weddings, but for corporate events and bat and bar mitzvahs," she remarks. "Lancaster is becoming a big market for party planners."

Weddings, however, will be the focus of her business. "The average cost of a wedding today is between \$26,000 and \$30,000," she points out. Couple the expense with the many options that are now available and add the fact that we lead such busy lives, and you have the makings for problems. "My first priority is to establish a good relationship with a bride and her family," Lori says.

Last June, Lori was able to experience planning a wedding in an up-close and personal way, thanks to her daughter Kaylan's marriage to Matt Steinman. Lori not only helped them to plan the wedding, but Kaylan asked her to be her Matron of Honor. "It was a big honor," Lori says. "When she asked me to do it,

she began with 'You're my best friend.' Now, when I hear mothers complaining about the things their daughters do, I want to tell them 'This, too, shall pass.'

Lori reports that Kaylan made planning the wedding easy. "I'd boil her choices down to two and she would ask me for the pros and cons of each one," Lori remembers.

The wedding ceremony was held at St. Philip's Church. Afterward, guests were invited to retreat to the pavilion on church grounds to relax, listen to Celtic music and sip on sangria before heading to the Stone Mill Inn for the reception. That gesture helped to solve the problem of what out-of-town guests can do to pass the time during what could be an hours-long interlude between the ceremony and the reception (in this instance, it was 1-1/2 hours).

Once at the Stone Mill, the 170 guests enjoyed cocktails, hors d'oeuvres and music. "Dancing before dinner got everyone in a festive mood," Lori notes. During the first course, Kaylan and her father took to the dance floor for the traditional father/daughter dance.

What trends does Lori see for weddings?

**Weddings are becoming more of a group effort.** "Grooms are much more involved in decision making," she notes. Families are becoming involved, too. As far as financing a wedding is concerned,

Lori finds that couples are contributing and the families are sharing the expenses. "Nothing is set in stone anymore as to who pays for what. Families are working it out together."

**Rehearsal dinners** are taking on more of a party atmosphere. Also, the guest list is no longer confined to family members and attendants. Couples are using them to introduce their out-of-town guests to their families and to each other.

**The weekend-long wedding is still popular.** The pre-wedding itinerary often includes spa getaways, golf outings and luncheons, while Sunday features a brunch. "A lot of couples are sticking around for the brunch and using it as an opportunity to open their gifts in the presence of their families and friends," Lori explains.

**September and October** have become the most popular months for weddings in Lancaster. "May and June are still popular, but the weather is always iffy," she says. "If you're holding an outdoor wedding in May, remember that it could be 50 degrees or it could be 90 degrees." She also suggests that outdoor weddings be held no later than the end of September, again because of fluctuating temperatures.

**Holiday weddings** are also gaining in popularity. "They can be absolutely beautiful," Lori says of the decorating options that abound. Timing also suits

many family members and out-of-town guests who might be better able to schedule vacations over the holidays. New Year's Eve weddings are also in vogue. "It just adds to the party atmosphere," Lori comments.

If an **at-home wedding** is in your plans, be aware that it is especially stressful for the family. "The weather is a major concern," Lori says.

An **outdoor, off-premises wedding/reception** has its pros and cons. "You can't beat the ambiance, but it does come with added costs," she says, referring to the price of renting a tent, tables/chairs, a dance floor, etc. And, according to Lori, you have to be happy with Plan B (an indoor or tented location, which is an added expense) should the weather not cooperate.

**Small, but extravagant weddings** are popular. Such weddings may involve 30-40 guests, but the setting, flowers, food, etc. are top notch. Couples that opt for such a wedding often host parties for friends and family after they return from their honeymoons.

Lastly, if **something goes wrong** – and something surely will – don't beat yourself up over it. "There are things you just can't control," Lori affirms. "You can't allow the weather or feuding relatives to ruin your day." ❖

*To contact The Perfect Plan by Lori Hemphill, call 872-9068.*



*Lori Hemphill (left) parlayed 25 years of working in the food and beverage industry to help plan her daughter Kaylan's June wedding to Scott Steinman. Lori's younger daughter, Marisa, joins Kaylan and Lori, who was her daughter's Matron of Honor, in the photo.*