

All you need is Love

THE busy summer wedding season has started and there is a wealth of talent in the North East dedicated to making your big day special. As part of The Journal's Think North East First campaign LIZ LAMB and FRANCESCA CRAGGS show you how to keep it local.



WEDDINGS are big business. There's the dress, the venue, photographer, flowers, rings and reception to organise, to mention just a few, so it's little wonder the cost of a wedding can run into thousands.

Here in the North East there is a wealth of talent to guarantee you a happy wedding day and encourage you to support the local economy.

In February last year The Journal launched the Think North East First campaign to highlight to readers the important role they can play in helping the region through these tough economic times. We are encouraging readers to "make a difference with every pound they spend."

By supporting local enterprise we can keep our high streets vibrant, reduce the carbon footprint of our weddings and maintain a strong creative community.

Here we highlight to some of the North East talent who want to make your wedding extra-special.

The wedding planner

ANYONE who has seen the film *The Wedding Planner* starring Jennifer Lopez could be forgiven for thinking wedding planners are super expensive and intent on taking over



AT THE HELM Jo Harris who runs Simply Bows and Chair covers from her Darras home.

your big day. This image couldn't be more wrong, says mother-of-two Donna Redfearn, who has been running her company, North East Wedding Planners, since January 2009.

"It's a misconception that wedding planners are expensive. It's very stressful organising a wedding. A lot of couples get engaged and don't actually make the wedding because they argue over the budget or the arrangements.

"Men don't really want to get involved in the nitty gritty of the organisation. Many women work full-time and don't have time during the week to do any planning or they have children and don't have the time or resources.

"We offer a professional yet personal service, it's all about what the couple wants, it's not about our service, it is about how we can help them. If you are on a tight budget planning your big day can be very stressful. In the North East the average wedding costs between £7,000 and £12,000 it seems like a lot of money but in wedding terms it isn't."



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BEAUTIFUL Katie Slater's designs, above, have recently caught the *Vogue's* *Bride* magazine



Donna, who used to work in events and project management, before having her children, says by hiring a wedding planner, couples could actually save money on their big day rather than adding to the budget employing her services.

She says: "By hiring a wedding planner we can not only take the stress out of organising the wedding but we can save people money too. "I have a list of 2,500 suppliers on our books and they give us a minimum of 10% budget.

"We had a recent wedding where we save the couple 25%. This meant they could afford to put that money towards extras they originally wanted but thought they couldn't afford.

"They had a lovely wedding with Viva Las Vegas dancers and celebrity magicians.

"Other people use the savings towards a new sofa or an extra week of honeymoon."

The 35-year-old, who also runs a classic car wedding hire company with her husband Mark, can help organise everything needed for the special day from the venue to the dress, flowers and entertainment, and everything else in between.

"We don't have to organise the whole wedding," explains Donna, of Chester-le-Street. "Sometimes I come in two to three weeks before the wedding date when the bride has forgotten to book the wedding car for example.

"We have a lot of customers who work full-time. A bridal shop is often open 9am to 5pm which is no good for them so I arrange for them to



have a private viewing in an evening. "I am also there on the big day to help and support the couple.

"I have stayed in touch with a lot of the brides and have become friends with some of them. A lot of them are pregnant now so we might branch out into christenings in the future." ● For more information on North East Wedding Planners call 0191 388 2387 or 07960 243534. Visit www.newp.co.uk

The stationery designer

Katie Slater's stunning bespoke stationery has already won the seal of approval from the odd celebrity or

TIE THE KNOT Wedding planner, Donna Redfearn, from Chester le Street, with husband Mark and sons Ben 6, and Adam, 4.



Brides are requesting everything from Diamante brooches on their sashes, to silk butterflies

for every occasion. The bespoke range includes gift tags, bottle labels, invitations, favours, table plans, scented candles, and cards.

"The thing that sets my collection apart is its bespoke nature. I wanted to keep my designs simple yet beautiful. The inspiration for my designs comes from everywhere.

I also have a lot of input from customers. It's their wedding day and their theme.

"Some of the words are very personal and I'm more than happy to cater for whatever anyone wants. When you see client's photographs of the day, it makes my job all worthwhile."

● For more details email: hello@katiesue.co.uk or visit www.katiesue.co.uk

The table dresser

Having worked in the charity sector for over 18 years, Jo Harris knows a thing or two about organising events.

So when the opportunity arose to buy into a chair cover and accessories franchise, she was more than ready for the challenge. The 52-year-old from Darras Hall recently invested in Simply Bows & Chair Covers covering the areas of North Northumberland and Newcastle.

Jo, who has worked for the Evening Chronicle Sunshine fund for the past eight years, said: "My family has now grown up so I fancied a new challenge and career move. My 26-year-old daughter Charlotte will be taking over the helm of the Newcastle franchise so it will be a real family affair."

Simply Bows and Chair Covers manufacture high quality chair covers and accessories, available to hire or purchase for a range of special events.

Jo is keen to provide a personal, one-to-one service.

She said: "All our chair covers are tailor-made by our in-house seamstress to fit venues across the North East. We provide products which are very high quality, offer private consultations with our brides and clients and provide a full fitting service."

And brides are becoming ever more adventurous, according to Jo.

"Brides are going for vibrant colours this year. Heathers and greens are popular, and we are also seeing a lot of yellow themes. Our organza sashes come in literally hundreds of colours and it's amazing how many different ways you can tie one.

"Our chair covers come in black, butter and ivory as standard, but we can source everything from tartan designs to Newcastle United stripes. If we haven't got it in stock, we can get it."

Accessories are also an emerging trend, says Jo.

"Brides are requesting everything from Diamante brooches on their sashes, to silk butterflies which are especially popular at the moment. We are set to bring some new and exciting ideas from the US later this year."

Working with the customer is the best part of the job for Jo.

"It's nice to see a job from beginning to end. The process starts at the wedding fairs when you first meet the brides, and we then invite them to our homes for a consultation to chat about their colour schemes. Seeing the finished result and a happy bride gives me a real buzz."

● For more information contact Jo tel: 07887 533 443 email: jo@simplybowsandchaircovers.co.uk www.simplybowsandchaircovers.co.uk