

Wedding festival coming together

Anna Maria Island Sun News Story
By Tom Vaught | sun staff writer

CORTEZ – The annual Island-wide festival is on track to be bigger and better than last year, thanks to a lot of volunteers.

The Anna Maria Island Chamber of Commerce Wedding Festival Planning Committee met on Tuesday, Feb. 8, at the Weddings on Water floating chapel docked at the Seafood Shack and it was “all systems go” for the event on Sunday, Feb. 28.

Chapel owners Jill Fisher and her husband, Captain Orca, welcomed the group with snacks and some bubbly and showed them around the only floating chapel in the United States. More than 40 people sat in the chapel’s oak pews with room for more. The cozy craft kept the cold wind at bay.

There were new wedding vendors to introduce, including IMG Sports and Siesta Trolleys. Organizer Caryn Hodge, of the Chiles Group, talked about the advertising that they hope will attract more prospective brides and grooms and wedding organizers than before. She said that ads would start appearing shortly on Bright House Network’s cable TV stations. She said they were also e-mailing people who had signed up with the Chamber Web site and mailing people on a list from the Bradenton Herald.

“The county tourism board voted to give us money because they thought we would be able to bring in people who would get married here,” she said. “We’re spending some of that money to reach people most likely to come.”

The highlight of the event will be the sunset finale at the Sandbar restaurant with a mock wedding. Janice Bergbom, of the Chiles Group, said that they had made orange boutonnieres for vendors so that visitors would recognize them to ask questions. She said this year, vendors would be part of the finale.

“At 5:20, Mile Sales will invite you all to be seated,” she said. “The people in the audience will be the vendors.”

The Billy Rice Band, a popular local group, will play on the deck at the Sandbar after the mock wedding. One of the members, Jack Elka, was a founder of the Chamber Wedding Group that puts on the festivals.

Budweiser gave the festival a boost, according to Chuck and Dara Caudill, who are in charge of signage. The beer company, which will also provide refreshments in the Groom Zone, has agreed to pay for all the signage, which is a necessity since visitors will be touring the Island in trolleys and limousines during the day, stopping to visit with vendors.

They still need vendors for the Groom Zone at the Anna Maria Island Community Center. Future grooms and groomsmen are welcome to stay there while the ladies check out some of the offerings that may be lost on men.

“The cost is only \$50 and you get a small table, so if you have something of interest for men, this is a real bargain,” Hodge said. “Simply Gourmet will provide the food.”

Chuck Weirich, in charge of the Web site, said that the event was now linked to several wedding sites including Perfect Wedding, SRQ Magazine, GetMarried.com, brides.com and wedding wire. The group’s Facebook page now has 17 vendors.

As for wedding vendors, there are 100 and they have closed out, according to Katy Demick.

Transportation has been increased to handle expected attendance, Hodge told the organizers. There will be three trolleys and seven limos with more seating capacity. Committee members also have taken steps to make sure everybody can get transportation back to their vehicles.

“We are asking some of the trolleys and limos to stick around after the Billy Rice Band finishes at 8 p.m.,” she said. “If people miss that, they will still be able to take the Island trolley.”

