

New event center is jewel in Brunswick crown

by Mimi Vanderhaven

Brunswick's Kevin Schemrich knows a thing or two about throwing a good party. For the past 18 years he's served as the president of *Brunswick Old Fashion Days*, an annual community carnival featuring everything from cotton candy to ferris wheels. But most of the 30,000 guests have no idea of the year-long planning that goes on behind the scenes.

"It's hard work," admits Kevin, "but we have a great committee. Getting community leaders and volunteers to agree on things is always tough, but it's a piece of cake compared to planning a wedding reception."

The secret to a flawless wedding reception, Kevin reveals, is to listen to the bride. "It's her day," he says. "She's the boss."

Schemrich, vice-president and co-owner of Brunswick's new *Diamond Event Center* along with his wife, Karen, also knows a thing or two about weddings.

He's been invited to over 500 of them.

As the former lead singer for the popular seven-piece *On Tap* band, the crooner has for two decades performed everything from Glen Miller to Metallica. "From the vantage point of the stage, you learn a lot about the front of house aspects of a wedding reception," he explains. "The dos and don'ts of the necessary organized chaos become very clear. Although things have to be structured, it's crucial to remain flexible as the party unfolds. We don't like to say 'no,' especially to a bride."

Although Kevin has extraordinary event planning skills, he admits to a significant flaw: "I can't even cook a hot dog."

That's why he's the *vice-president, darling*.

Diamond Event Center president and executive chef, Karen Schemrich, doesn't allow him in the kitchen. "He might not know the difference between a convection oven and confectioner's sugar, but he's handy to have around."

For nearly 20 years, Karen ran a catering company along with her grandmother and sister. She became a partner in Millie's Catering (named for her grandmother) in 1989, and bought out her relatives in the early nineties. "I wasn't involved in the family business in the beginning," Karen shares, "but just prior to a big catering event my grandmother found herself in the hospital, and everyone turned to me for help. I remember being in my grandmother's hospital room frantically writing down a nut roll recipe. It was exciting and the event was a huge success. I was hooked."

Karen also attended Tri-C's hospitality management program and keeps a large herb garden in her backyard. "My grandmother was quite an inspiration for me."

When Millie passed away about five years ago, Karen was left with a large hole in her heart. "I still miss her terribly," she says, looking away. "My grandmother's big dream was to own her own party center. It didn't happen during her lifetime, but I believe she

owns this place as much as we do."

The Diamond Event Center location has been a party center of one kind or another for thirty years. But never like this, darling. The Schemrichs purchased the center in late 2003 and completely renovated it last year, including new drywall and paint, new carpet, a restored ceiling and chandeliers, and new lighted accent areas. You'll also find a new custom-made 30-foot black walnut bar, a new grand ballroom featuring a 1,350 square-foot dance floor, plus a chapel and gazebo (see front cover), encouraging many a bride to hold her wedding and reception at the same facility.

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Diamond Event Center's unique niche is "affordable elegance," and although that might sound like a cliché, darling, it's true. "When we did our research," explains Karen, "we were struck by the fact that most

brides simply have the most elegant wedding they can afford. We realized that if we could create an elegant feel at an affordable price, that would make us successful, and that's what's happening."

The renovations have certainly given the center a light, airy, elegant feel, but special touches like the new chocolate fountain take it a step further. Guests actually place their choice of goodies from strawberries to cookies into the flowing fountain, covering them with warm, delicious chocolate.

But don't think this kind of thing is expensive. Karen and Kevin, along with operations manager Kelly Moran, have designed wedding packages that save most brides anywhere from \$1 to \$8 per person compared to competing facilities. That adds up whether you're hosting 50 guests or Diamond Event Center's maximum of 500 guests. The complete dinner buffet packages range from about \$16 to \$22 per person or you can pay a little more by adding on just about any option you want.

"We have taken 'no' out of our vocabulary," says Kevin. "Our basic packages are both elegant and affordable, but we can tailor them to each bride's individual taste and budget." Although Karen can prepare any entrée you want, darling, some of the favorites for large events include Braised Beef Tenderloin Tips, Prime Rib, Chicken Cordon Bleu, Beef

Roulade and Oven Roasted Loin of Pork. But if you're planning a school banquet instead of a wedding reception, you'll also find on the menu spaghetti, fried chicken and mac & cheese. Or choose from popular and spectacular themed events like Red, White and Blue, Country Western BBQ, German Oktoberfest, Victorian Lace Dessert Fancy, Asian, Chinese New Year's, African Jungle, Cinco de Mayo, Celebrate Christmas, St Patrick's Day, or customize your own.

Karen, Kevin and their staff also stay on top of industry trends. They're members of the *International Caterers Association* and *CaterSource*, the nation's leading organization in catering innovation and education. "It's important to know the trends," says Karen. "When a bride-to-be asks us about a new trend she saw in a bridal magazine, we want to already know about it."

Mimi asked Karen about wedding planning trends she's seen over the years. "Perhaps the biggest trend is that more and more brides are paying for some or all of their own weddings. This may be because women are marrying later in life than they used to, and often already have jobs and established homes. Very often we never meet the parents until the reception. The days of daddy footing the entire bill are dwindling, but it still happens."

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by Benjamin Margalit/Margalit Studio

Caterer and crooner Karen and Kevin Schemrich, owners of the all new *Diamond Event Center*, have been orchestrating large events their entire careers.