

## Easy cost-cutting

Tivoli-based wedding consultant and event planner Mary Beth Halpin notes that, while some couples are nixing luxuries like stretch limos or sumptuous centerpieces, it doesn't mean they have to forgo a splendid wedding. "People are still going to get married," she says. "And no matter what the budget, it can still be a wonderful celebration."

"Especially in these economic times, some vendors might consider giving discounts whenever possible," she notes. "They want to work, too. So prices can be a bit more negotiable in some cases" — which can translate into possible savings on everything from flowers to banquet halls to music.

Couples in a cash crunch sometimes ponder the do-it-yourself route, handling everything from decorating the hall to arranging for reception food. This can be a good move for a small event, especially if everyone involved gets a kick out of hands-on responsibilities. But wedding planner Mazzuca says it's best not to skip getting expert help altogether. If you can't afford to hire someone to oversee the entire event, it's still a good idea to schedule at least one or two consultations: "Tweaking the details can be a big stress reducer."

## How one couple saved cash...

Laura Grosselfinger Neier and her husband, David, wed in June 2008. Laura is an assistant school principal in Queens; David, 33, works in the computer field. They live in Yorktown and were married on the beautiful grounds of Mills Mansion State Historic Site in Staatsburg.

"We didn't have a huge budget," says Laura. "We'd just bought a new home and were just starting out. But we wanted a wedding that was authentic, that spoke of who we are, without breaking the bank. I'd seen others spend exorbitant amounts on their weddings, and I didn't want to go overboard."

Laura admits that, even though they decided to have a relatively low-budget wedding, "still, details mattered. The last thing I thought I wanted was a wedding planner. But friends said it was worth the investment." She hired Jennifer Mazzuca, who, Laura says, "helped cut costs in ways I wouldn't have known about. For instance, the caterer was a friend of Jennifer's; he was a CIA grad, and the food was great."

The couple got married outdoors, under a tent, with about 140 guests. Use of the Mills Mansion site cost just \$500. Since she's computer-savvy, Laura created her own invitations, save-the-date cards, and wedding-day programs. The couple also set up a simple Web site with information and directions for guests.

The biggest splurge was her \$1,800 Maggie Sottero "Jorie" wedding gown. "It was more expensive than I intended, but I'm now in the process of selling it so someone else can enjoy it," Laura says. She posted the dress on a no-commission Web site, *Oncewed.com*, that sells previously worn wedding dresses.

Her veil was a sample from a bridal shop. "It was missing some beads, so my mom sewed some on for me; now a friend is going to wear it for her wedding. My friends did my makeup and my mother's; we did spend to have our hair done by a stylist." Laura's niece served as flower girl, wearing a \$35 dress with a pretty bow added.



**Sensible savings (at left):** Adding a ribbon to her flower girl's simple dress (top) allowed Laura to budget more for her own gown. This page: A friend of Mazzuca's prepared the buffet, and one of the couple's relatives baked the cake as a wedding gift. The bride designed her own invitations and place settings

## Flowers to flip-flops

They also saved money on flowers. "The only ones we had were my bouquet, the bridesmaids', and the boutonniere." For floral decorations, Laura's mom had planted some purple impatiens — matching the wedding's theme color — in her yard earlier in the spring. "She just arranged them in pretty pots that were up front during the ceremony."

Violin and cello music was provided by friends from Laura's family's church. "And we added little touches, like using birdseed instead of rice for guests to throw. My mom and grandfather put together packets using envelopes bought at a craft store, and birdseed from Home Depot."

Since the wedding was held on a summer day, Laura says, "My mom bought old-fashioned fans for 99 cents each, which we provided in a basket for guests. There was also a bin of flip-flop sandals from the dollar store for people to change into if they wore high heels and wanted to get comfortable."

Foodwise, they opted for an elegant buffet instead of sit-down table service. "Our guests said they liked this option because they could choose portion sizes themselves," Laura says. Rather than fancy centerpieces, each table was decorated with candles. "We also had table cards suggesting donations to a wildlife organization that my grandmother founded in Long Island, where I grew up."

A relative baked their two wedding cakes as a gift to the newlyweds. "We hired a bartender, but provided our own liquor and bought it from a store where we could return what wasn't used. Nothing went to waste."

## School-bus limousine

"We decided to pay for a live band — music and dancing is important to us," Laura says. Since the party was outdoors, restrooms had to be provided. "We chose to rent the Rolls-Royce of porta-potties. We didn't want to skimp on that," she laughs. "It had air-conditioning, wood paneling, and even recorded music playing inside."

The bash actually lasted for three days followed by a barbecue on Sunday for those who could stay.

The bride and groom rented rooms at a nearby B&B for family, and accommodated guests in local hotels. "We hired a yellow school bus to shuttle guests back and forth. Some of them are still talking about how much fun it was to ride in it."

A friend who's a professional photographer took Laura and David's wedding photos. "Then we put them on *Shutterfly.com*. For \$160, we have more than 400 photos posted. Now family and friends can see them no matter where they live," Laura says. Another friend filmed their wedding video, "and since I also teach broadcast journalism, I'm editing the video myself," she adds.

The newlyweds honeymooned in Italy, partly thanks to frequent-flier mileage; they also registered at *Honeyfund.com*, so friends and guests could give them gifts that ranged from breakfast in Rome to a gondola ride in Venice. "We'd always wanted to go to Italy. It was the perfect ending to a wonderful wedding. And we weren't broke when we got home," says Laura.