

Weddings that give back

For some couples, big day has big community impact



HEIDI HEILBRUNN / Staff

Amanda Sox and Jay Briggs kept the cost and environmental impact of their wedding down with secondhand tableware and flowers hand made from recycled fabric.

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When Alicia Hall thinks about her wedding day in 2004, it's not the minute details that stand out, but the overall feeling of love and unity that pervaded.

When she and husband David chose Jamaica as the location for their wedding, they wanted a ceremony that honored her husband's Jamaican heritage, celebrated the local culture and benefited the local community. They forewent the resort, found locals to bake their cake, to cook an authentic wedding meal and to provide traditional music. And they invited the community to celebrate with them.

That day, people who were strangers felt like family, and their wedding became a shared experience. It was exactly what the couple wanted – a wedding that represented not only who they were but what they believed in.

"We didn't need it to be all about us to fulfill us that day," says Alicia, 31, a certified natural health practitioner at Creative Health in Greenville.

Weddings are changing. Though some couples stick to traditional etiquette that dictates everything from how invitations are addressed to what to put on gift registries, others are seek-



MAKING YOUR WEDDING CHARITABLE

- **Charity shower:** Consider a bridal shower that collects donations instead of gifts or canned goods for the local food bank.
- **Donating the dress:** Organizations such as Brides Against Breast Cancer sell used dresses to raise money for breast cancer research.
- **Make giving back part of the planning:** Some brides and grooms vow to lose weight before their wedding, why not sign up for a charity run or walk? You can enlist the whole wedding party, have fun achieving a goal and raise money for a good cause at the same time.

Source: Amy Eisinger

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The plates and silverware for Amanda Sox and Jay Briggs' wedding were purchased at Goodwill, Salvation Army and Miracle Hill stores. They plan to donate the items back after the wedding.

ing ways to make "their day" more "our day."

Incorporating some sort of charitable element into a wedding is a growing trend, says Amy Eisinger, editor at WeddingChannel.com. The online site for all things wedding set up a charitable registry guide seven years ago due to demand. Non-profit organizations like Heifer International, and Ten Thousand Villages all have wedding registries. A survey last year showed 2 percent of couples signed up for charity registries.

"It doesn't sound like a whole lot but it is," Eisinger says. "It's a number that's gone up over the past couple of years.

So we do know that it is getting more popular."

Other organizations like the I Do Foundation (www.idofoundation.org), i-to-i (www.i-to-i.com) and Volunteer Guide (www.volunteerguide.org) offer couples and their guests the chance to give back through charity registries, make donations in place of giving favors and even take volunteer honeymoons, or "honeyteers."

And international disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and the earthquakes in Haiti and Japan have sparked greater

CHARITY

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awareness and a stronger interest in giving, Eisinger says. Making giving a part of a wedding sends a powerful message.

"The couple is saying 'OK, this is not only going to be part of our wedding day, but it's going to be something that is part of the vows,'" says Patrick Bladon, of combining charity and weddings.

In 2006, he and wife Caroline donated to the Susan G. Komen Foundation in place of giving wedding favors to honor Caroline's mother's fight with breast cancer.

"We're vowing, not necessarily to give just to Susan G. Komen every year, but just vowing to give back in general," Bladon says. "And it shares that message with those in attendance that day too."

For the Halls, involving the community in their Jamaican wedding was a way to make their spending count toward bettering other people's lives. In addition to hiring only local people, they also donated money to a local school. The impact is much longer lasting, Alicia says.

"We got more out of seeing those beautiful children eating this festive food that they know so well but probably have had once in their lives," Alicia says. "I couldn't have made

that joy up by myself."

Eisinger pegs the growth of charitable weddings to several factors. The average age of couples getting married these days is older (29 for brides and 31 for grooms, according to WeddingChannel.com), which means more couples are established in their lives and careers when they wed. Also, Eisinger says, many couples live together before they're married, meaning they might already have a pretty nice blender.

Though Bonnie and Aaron Barr hadn't lived together before they married earlier this month, the two, both 29 and long removed from college, had already lived a long time on their own. Since both were established in their careers at GE and had the standard collection of linens and kitchen gadgets, they wanted their wedding to "give back" to the local community, says Bonnie.

Instead of favors, the two donated to three charities: **Upstate Forever**, **Concerned Citizens for Animals and Safe Harbor**. They chose a local florist who used local seasonal blooms, and they were married at Pretty Place, whose reservation fee supports YMCA Camp Greenville.

The food was harder. Balancing budget and quality was tough, regardless of



Jeff Hall Photography

Bonnie and Aaron Barr, married on May 7, chose YMCA Camp Greenville's Pretty Place Chapel for the ceremony both for its beauty and because its rental fee benefits the camp.

charitable impact. Then the Barrs discovered Project Host Catering. The non-profit is part of the CC Pearce Community Culinary School, which provides free training to prepare the underemployed and unemployed for food service careers. The final menu included herbed grilled chicken and Caprese salad. And everyone loved the food.

"It just feels good that even though it's just one day, for us at least, something good is still coming of

it," Bonnie says. "That's what we really wanted to do. Weddings have such a big impact, but let's make it be a good impact for Greenville."

And impact doesn't have to be expensive. Jay Briggs and Amanda Sox proved that with their May 28 wedding. The two eco-minded theater artists wanted to be green so they focused on limiting waste and reducing environmental impact.

The ceremony and reception was in Sox's parents' front yard with deco-

rative fabric flowers made by Sox. For the picnic reception, having put the "kibosh" on paper products and with no budget for china, they used a grand collection of mismatched but nice plates, utensils and glasses from Salvation Army, Miracle Hill and Goodwill stores. They plan to donate the items back afterward.

"It's really indicative of the economic climate," Sox says. "I think lots of couples are doing this, smaller scale, doing what's really

important to them as a couple instead of what we're told is standard in the wedding industry."