

Ideas for wedding planning on a budget

BY DENISE SUTTERS

Copley News Service

Most girls dream of a fairytale wedding. And why not? Cinderella, Snow White and Sleeping Beauty married their Prince Charmings in grand fashion. But a fairytale wedding costs — a lot.

Joyce Smith, a coordinator for the Association of Bridal Consultants in New Milford, Conn., reports that the average price of a wedding is \$20,000. (In the Northeast and major metropolitan areas, the costs will be even higher.) Ouch! Not everyone has that kind of money laying around.

Smith and others know that, so the first thing she does when helping a couple plan their special day is to find out what kind of budget there is to work with and how many there are on the guest list.

“The main thing is getting the bride and groom to prioritize so they know where to funnel their money,” Smith said. “I want to know what is the top dollar they are willing to spend and their vision of their wed-

ding.

“You have to have an idea of what they consider an elegant affair, then you can break down their budget,” she said. “The guest list drives that budget. If they want an elegant wedding with 300 guests on a small budget, that is going to be tough.”

But not impossible if the couple is willing to cut back on reception expenses, invitations, thank-you notes and so on. For a really affordable wedding, experts say,

keep the guest list down to a reasonable number.

“A buffet can cost as much as \$15 per person,” said bridal consultant Vickie Hogan.

Multiply \$15 per head by 300 people and you already have spent \$4,500. Add the price of a wedding cake, which can cost up to \$3 per person (\$900), and already the wedding is too pricey for some budgets. However, reduce the guest list to 100 and the cost is very different

— \$1,800 for both the buffet and cake.

“The cake is something you want to invest in because it is the centerpiece of the reception,” Hogan said. “The key is to give yourself enough time to shop around so you can get the best deal possible.”

She also suggests shopping around for music and photography.

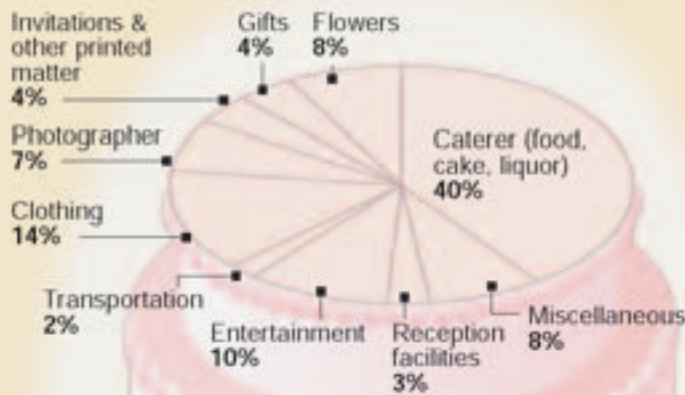
“There are a lot of free-

lance photographers who will take photos for less than a professional,” Hogan said. “The cost of photography depends on what is important to the couple. I would advise couples on a budget to hire a professional photographer to take the formal photos, then ask a friend with camera knowledge to photograph the reception.”

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Wedding costs

The average wedding cost in the U.S. is \$24,000, the bulk going toward the reception. Here's how typical wedding costs break down:



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