

The Berkshire Eagle

Wedding venues in the Berkshires

By Jenn Smith, Berkshire Eagle Staff

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Photo courtesy of Tricia McCormack photography

From gardens to barns, mountains to fountains, Berkshire County can offer an array of wedding backdrops and venues for couples near and far.

In recent years, a growing number of wedding planners, venues and vendors have taken a vested interest promoting the local wedding industry.

On Valentine's Day this year, Lenox-based marketing and public relations specialist Tara Consolati launched the Berkshire Wedding Collective -- "a carefully curated collection of only the finest wedding professionals" to highlight wedding venues and services available in the Berkshires. The website features highly stylized photo galleries and narrative blog posts showcasing the scenery of places like Cranwell Resort & Spa and The Mount in Lenox; Hancock Shaker Village and Gedney Farm in New Marlborough, among others.

"The Berkshires is just an amazing locale. It's such an attraction for someone who's interested in the arts, history, music, theater, dance," said Consolati, who collects feedback from vendors and wedding planners.

She said a report done for Classical Tents a couple of years ago stated that the typical wedding includes 100 to 150 guests from both in and out of town, generating \$85,000 to \$125,000 in local revenues, attributed to lodging, facility and amenities rentals, travel costs, shopping, dining out and other economic indicators.

"There are many of us here trying to bring more awareness to couples about the Berkshires as a destination wedding location," she said.

Consolati described the range of the region's clientele.

"There are those of us who are born in the Berkshires, live in the Berkshires, and those who were born here, moved and want to come back. There are also people coming here whose family has a second home here or who went to summer camp here. Then, there are [couples] who want to come here to escape the city and do something different," said Consolati.

"That's the key thing -- every bride and groom wants their wedding to be different," she said. For Alee and Bill Moncy of Pittsfield, who married Oct.



Photo courtesy of Tricia McCormack

12, being able to have an event with a "custom feel" was key.

"We wanted something with a little personality, some sort of unique qualities. I also loved the look of rustic barn weddings I've seen," Alee said.

The couple knew they were planning for the fall, and wanted an outdoor ceremony and an indoor reception.

"Although we did include the Pioneer Valley in our venue search since I grew up in Ashfield, we [both] live in the Berkshires and wanted our friends and family to experience all that the Berkshires have to offer during their weekend stay," Alee said.

The couple ultimately married on the Jacob's Pillow dance festival campus in Becket, with a ceremony on the Inside/Out stage, which had a "striking view" of the Berkshire hills, and a reception in the barn-style Doris Duke Theatre.

Like many Berkshire cultural sites, Jacob's Pillow offered its own special events planner, Dora Quintanilla, to help connect Alee and Bill with a local caterer (Dawn Van Ness of Mezze Catering in Williamstown), a deejay (DJ BFG of Pittsfield), and photographer (Christopher Duggan of New York City and the Berkshires).

Grace Leathrum is now trying to promote similar connections to help tout The Mount, author Edith Wharton's historic Lenox estate, as a wedding and special events venue. Leathrum started working back in November as a special events coordinator for the 49-acre property.

"Our main goal is to be more involved in the wedding industry in the Berkshires," she said.

Last year, when The Mount's vacancies for weddings filled, staff got into the habit of making referrals to other venues, like Chesterwood, the country home, studios and gardens of sculptor Daniel Chester French, because it has "a similar look and feel to The Mount," Leathrum said. She'll also refer larger wedding parties to places like Cranwell; The Mount has a capacity for up to 275 people in an outdoor tented event, but only about 120 inside the mansion.

About two months ago, The Mount also launched a wedding page and blog on its website. The webpage also highlights a new venue for smaller weddings, after-parties, showers and rehearsals, its 1902 Stables. The grounds, according to the website, are also dog-friendly.

The marketing and its amenities are working for The Mount, which is already booking into the 2015 season.

"I think aesthetic really prevails. Almost all of the ceremonies take place in the garden," said Leathrum.

"People now seem to be gravitating towards a 'Great Gatsby,' 'Downton Abbey' and 1920s themes," she said noting that the venue has scheduled a photo shoot in May to stage a 1920s art deco scene. "We're just trying to find out what draws people and keep it going," said Leathrum. "The goal for us is always to keep business in the Berkshires."