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# Pandemic unleashes a tsunami of weddings in Minnesota

There are too many ceremonies and not enough venues.

By Jeff Strickler Star Tribune

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For the 16 years that she's owned Lasting Impressions Weddings, Sarah Trotter has counseled her clients to be flexible when picking a date for their nuptials. She's still offering that advice, although this year it has taken on a whole new dimension.

Be flexible about the day of the week. Be flexible about the time of day. Be flexible about the date. Be flexible about the month. And if none of that works, be flexible about the year.

"Clients have to be much more open-minded," she said.

A tsunami of weddings—some pushed back by the pandemic and some previously planned for this year—has inundated the wedding industry. This year, it might be easier to find someone to marry than to find a time and place to hold the ceremony.

Some venues are booked solid for the rest of the wedding season, which typically is May through October. For the places that do have openings, the most popular times have long been snatched up. (How do you feel about a ceremony at 5:30 p.m. on a Monday?)

And wedding planners are running themselves ragged trying to make everything work out. After two years of very little business, some planners are so busy that they are having to turn down new clients.

There are expected to be between 2.5 million (the estimate from the Wedding Report, which tracks market data) and 2.6 million (from the Knot wedding website) couples exchanging vows

nationwide this year. Whichever number you use, it will be the most weddings in nearly four decades.

And Minnesotans are doing their part to contribute to the tidal wave, with 35,000 weddings expected in the state—and another 35,000 in Wisconsin.

"It's a little crazy," said Jenna Culley of Minneapolis-based Jenna Culley Events. "I've never seen anything like it."

So, what happened? In this case, it's more a matter of what didn't happen—weddings, in particular.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced the postponement of many, if not most, of the weddings planned for 2020. For instance, Trotter had 45 weddings on her calendar that year, 39 of which were postponed until 2021.

There already were weddings planned for 2021, so the delayed ceremonies had to be shoehorned into the schedule. And then the delta variant swept through, forcing the re-postponement of 2020 weddings plus the rescheduling of 2021 ones.

As a result, the wedding season of 2022 opens with a backlog of postponed ceremonies and a full slate of new ones that likely will stretch well into 2023.

And it isn't just the ceremonies that are at issue. Frustrated by the repeated delays, "some couples had weddings involving just their immediate families, maybe five or 10 people, and now they want to have a big celebration," Trotter said. Of course, that also means finding a place to do that.

(continued)

## New problems, new solutions

To deal with all this, wedding planners have had to become creative. With traditional patterns flying out the window, traditional solutions won't work, either.

It starts with days of the week. Weekend weddings are nice, but there aren't enough weekends to go around this year.

"It used to be that we were busy every Friday, Saturday and Sunday," said Christy O'Keefe, chief operating officer of Bellagala, a St. Paul wedding service. "Now it's Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday, and even an occasional Tuesday."

Weekday weddings are scheduled for late afternoon or early evening, which gives guests options normally not available.

"In-town guests can go to work that day, if they want to," she pointed out. "You still have time for the ceremony, a dinner and then dancing until 1 o'clock." And if you're a real trouper—or don't have enough PTO on the books—you can even stagger back into the office the next morning.

Another option reportedly gaining traction is the morning wedding. With the service slated for 10 a.m., you can hold the wedding and a reception and still clear out of the venue in time for it to reset for a second ceremony in the afternoon.

One drawback to this scheduling is that the bridesmaids' ritual of spending hours fixing their hair and doing their makeup can end up starting at 5 a.m. On the other hand, everyone's home by 3 p.m. and can take a nap.

## The big picture

Some couples are setting broader parameters to their timing.

"You start thinking of different months," Trotter said. "Everyone is thinking of summer or fall, but maybe you want to consider a winter wedding."

Extending your planning schedule also helps.

"Most of our clients used to plan 12 months in advance," she said. "Now we're getting clients who are planning 15 to 16 months out in order to get the venue they want."

The most sought-after venues tend to be in or close to the metro area. Opening up the search radius also opens up scheduling options.

"Many of our clients are going much farther out," Culley said. "They're looking 20, 30 or 40 minutes away."

Then again, the flip side of that is to stay home.

"We've seen an uptick in backyard weddings," she said. There are no worries of a scheduling conflict there. "People control their own backyards."

Entrepreneurs Carolyn Germaine and Louise Nyquist have launched Backyard Wedding Sites, a service that plays matchmaker for engaged couples looking for something more picturesque than your typical swing set and trampoline-dominated yard and homeowners proud of their elaborate gardens.

"It's for couples looking for private, one-of-a-kind sites and hosts with beautifully landscaped backyards," Germaine said. "We think of ourselves as the Airbnbs of the wedding world."

The company, which is hosting a free wedding fair May 22 at the Embassy Suites in Bloomington (tickets are available on their website), is looking to circumvent the long waiting lists at other locations.

"Traditional venues are struggling to accommodate all the couples" looking to get married post-pandemic, Germaine said. "A lot of them don't want to delay their wedding again. For smaller weddings—50 or fewer guests—it can be hard to find a location."

Even if you opt for a backyard wedding, one of the best ways to alleviate the scheduling strain is to enlist a pro, Culley said.

"I don't mean just me, I mean any wedding planner," she said. "We know the venues. We have the connections to the people who run them and are able to reach out to them. We know the options. The clients, not so much."



**Jeff Strickler** is the assistant features editor for the Star Tribune. He has spent most of his career working for the Variety section, including reviewing movies and covering religion. Now he leads a team of a reporters who cover entertainment and lifestyle issues.