

Reception Fare

Planning a tasteful wedding feast

By Karen Lane

Now that the ceremony is over, it's time to get the party started.

Just as the wedding ritual is a celebration of the joining of two people, the reception is a joyous kick-off of the marital journey they will share. And with all the possibilities, from relaxed cocktail gatherings to formal seated dinners, the soiree should be a reflection of the bride and groom's own style.

The reception food is always a fun way for just-wed couples to make a statement, according to Wendy Burchett, wedding event manager at Sea Palms Golf and Tennis Resort. She says today's bride typically opts for customized wedding reception fare that suits her tastes and fits her budget. There are no limitations and imagination is highly encouraged.

"We can do anything they can think of," she says. It's important that the bride is involved in creating the menu, according to Burchett. Some even provide recipes for specific dishes they want included at the reception.

With an average of 35 wedding related events held on property per year, Burchett is busy meeting with brides-to-be year round. She works alongside executive chef Willie Sabie to create the precise experience each bride desires. As a team, they discuss ideas, look at photos for possibilities and conduct tastings so that everything is just as she imagined.

"We encourage the brides to do a menu tasting," Burchett says. "We take a lot of pride in our food and these are great chefs."

The facilities allow for every type of reception, be it a small brunch buffet; strolling, heavy hors d'oeuvres and cocktails; or, a plated, sit-down dinner.

Holding a reception early in the day has advantages such as simplicity – the gathering is usually shorter in duration and less detailed - and the cost is often less, but elegance need not be compromised.

At a recent Sea Palms reception, the couple decided a brunch buffet was ideal for them. The wedding ceremony was held at 10:30 a.m. and the brunch reception immediately followed. The food was traditional breakfast fare and the only alcohol served was in the form of a signature drink.

"It's a good way to save money – about \$5 to \$10 per person on the food. And people don't eat or drink as heavily for brunch," Burchett says. "The couple had a fruity signature drink to save money, too. It was really cute."

Wedding cakes are another way to personalize a wedding reception. Gone are the days when wedding cakes were plain white, tiered and mostly dry and tasteless. Customized wedding cakes are all the rage today. Burchett says colors like brown and champagne and even hot pink are chosen by brides. In-house pastry chef Troy Long "blows brides and grooms away with his creative mind," she says.

Bride-to-be Stephanie Williams and her betrothed, Travis Tarbet, of Clemson, S.C., are working with Burchett to plan their destination wedding. The couple has family in the Golden Isles and has been vacationing in the area for several years and felt it was the ideal setting for their nuptials. Following a 5 p.m. wedding ceremony in late June 2009, the couple will host a reception that will

celebrate everything they embrace about St. Simons Island.

The party will begin with servers offering guests a couple of signature drinks such as a Georgia Peach Bellini and a yet-to-be-named gin and tonic type concoction along with coastal themed hors d'oeuvres like shrimp shooters, bacon wrapped scallops and mini crab cakes.

"We wanted a beach theme because we fell in love with the charm of St. Simons Island," Williams says.

Family and tradition are important to Williams and Tarbet so they decided to feature some family members' signature creations during the heavy hors d'oeuvres portion of the celebration.

"My grandmother makes the most delicious warm pimento cheese spread and toasted baguettes," Williams says, "and Travis' aunt makes fabulous pizzelles, buckeyes and nut rolls."

A small tag will identify each item, which family member contributed the dish and offer a brief explanation of its importance to the couple.



Stephanie Williams and Travis Tarbet



Sea Palms pastry chef, Troy Lang