



AZTECA

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Got an hour? Get hitched

Metro Atlanta couples taking part in Wed-a-thon

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By Chandra R. Thomas
For the AJC

On Nov. 14, Charlotte Addison will be decked out in a veil and floor-length gown with a flowing train. She'll stroll teary-eyed down the aisle, with a fresh flower bouquet as her husband-to-be, his groomsmen and her bridesmaids look on.



After sealing their "I dos" with a smooch, she and her new husband, Gregory Cobb, will pose for photos before making their grand entrance into a ballroom reception filled with their family and friends.

They'll engage in all the usual traditions, a first dance as husband and wife, she'll throw the bouquet and he'll toss her garter. They will cut their cake together and even listen to a few of their loved ones struggle through emotional well-wishes during a champagne toast.

It'll be a traditional wedding in every way — except that it'll all take place within one hour and cost a total of \$80. That the modest fee will be going to charity is, well, icing on the wedding cake.

"I'm an older bride, but my big dream was always to walk down the aisle with my parents there taking pictures," Addison said.

The Suwanee couple's wedding plans were derailed last September when a week before their more than 200-guest ceremony, Addison, a kidney patient, had to be hospitalized with a serious infection. Since then, the wedding in her hometown of Carrollton had been postponed indefinitely — she went back to the hospital several times, and Cobb lost his job.

Their wedding dreams are coming true thanks to a fund-raiser benefiting the Atlanta Children's Shelter. They are just one of nearly two dozen metro Atlanta couples signed up so far to participate in 40-40-40 Wed-a-thon. That's \$40 per bride, \$40 per groom and a total of 40 guests may be invited to attend.

On Nov. 14, organizers plan to start performing 40 wedding ceremonies (religious or civil at the couple's request) and 40 separate receptions for 40 couples for 40 nonstop hours beginning at 8 a.m. to 12:01 a.m. Monday.

It will take place with the help of volunteers at the Atlanta Marriott Northwest hotel near I-75 and Windy Hill.

Enlarge photo



Phil Skinner, pskinner@ajc.com

Charlotte Addison and Gregory Cobb plan to participate in the Wed-a-thon fund-raising event in which 40 couples will get married in 40 hours. Addison and Cobb had to delay their originally planned ceremony because of an illness.

Enlarge photo



Vino Wong, wwong@ajc.com

Nadya Valdivieso (left) of Lynn Wells Designs puts together a sample hand-tied bridal bouquet to show wedding planner and Wed-a-thon organizer Sylvia Wayfer-Clark at Eki Flowers in Lilburn.

The cost of hosting a wedding big enough to accommodate both of their families had forced Stacey Stevens and her fiancé, Lorenza Saunders, of Norcross to put off their nuptials since their

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engagement in 2005.

"He found out about it on Craigslist, and when he told me it was \$80, I said, 'Let's do it,'" Stevens said. "I'm so excited. We have friends and family coming from out of town. We get to share in some of the same experiences like couples who spent thousands of dollars on their wedding."

Antionette and Mitchell Ward of Lawrenceville are renewing their vows after eight years of marriage.

"We have three young kids, and we thought it would be nice for them to see us do this," Antionette said.

An array of local florists, lighting designers, photographers and cake designers, along with the hotel, have donated their services. It's the brainchild of Atlanta wedding planner Sylvia Wayfer-Clark of Weddings by Stephanie Marie. She said she decided to use her 15 years of experience to give back to the community.

"My husband and I are in the car all the time and we see homeless people out there with buckets asking for money," said Wayfer-Clark, who had no prior affiliation to the shelter before approaching its staff about coordinating the event. "I turned to him one day and said, 'I'm tired of giving \$2 and \$3 here and there; I want to do something bigger.' He said, 'Why don't you use your talent as a wedding planner to make a difference?'"

Wayfer-Clark hopes to raise \$5,000 for the nonprofit, which finds housing, counseling and educational resources for homeless families. Wedding guests are encouraged to donate items such as sheets, medicine, pots and other much-needed household goods listed on the shelter's Web site.

"I think it's an incredibly selfless and generous event," shelter development director Tony Conway said. "This is giving many people the opportunity to get married while generating funds for us. It costs about \$10,000 a year to stabilize a family. The fees from the couples alone should raise enough to provide three months of services for a family."


With the average American wedding costing about \$21,000, Wayfer-Clark said that the event's charitable benefits also extend to the couples.

"With the economy the way it is now, a lot of people are cutting back and they just can't afford to have a wedding," she said. "A lot of the women don't want a justice of the peace wedding, so they try to hold out until they get the money for a ceremony with all the bells and whistles. We're allowing couples to have a wedding and a reception that may have been beyond their reach in today's economic environment for just \$80."

Cobb and his future wife can relate. They're working to rebuild their nest egg now that, after a yearlong layoff, he recently found work as a forklift operator.

"It's a great idea, helping people out and helping us out at the same time," he said. "It's really great."

For more information about the event, visit www.40-40-40.com.



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