

### Garden Weddings Ring Up Profit

It only took attending a son's outdoor wedding to give Mary Ann Norton the idea of putting her gardens to work. An avid gardener with a tool-handly husband, she set her plan in motion. Two months later, her second son was married by a pond in her front yard. A year later, when her third son decided to get married at home as well, Norton and her husband Gary got serious about her idea, recognizing that they needed a shelter in case of rain.

"Gary built a post and beam shelter from scratch, and we installed pavers," says Norton. "He followed a plan from a company that recycles old buildings for post and beam structures. The beams were from a granary in Saskatchewan, and the purlins that held the shingles were from wooden silos on my parents' farm."

She advertised and had six weddings the first summer. Seven years later, they are up to 70 weddings per year and have a total of nearly 8 acres of gardens and landscaped areas. They have hosted wedding ceremonies as large as 400 people with participants from Indonesia, Ethiopia, Russia, China and a number of other countries.

In addition to as many as five wedding ceremonies on a weekend, the Nortons also host teas and lunches on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. These tend to appeal mostly to ladies groups and organizations. For these, she offers some combination of soup, salad, fruit, breads, sandwiches, tea and dessert served on good linen and fine china.

The weddings consist of only the ceremony, not receptions. Originally, she charged separately for site, chairs and audio equipment. Starting in 2005 she will be charging a set price of \$1,000 for a Saturday or Sunday afternoon or evening wedding and \$800 for a Friday evening, Saturday or Sunday morning wedding. Brides and grooms are responsible for arranging for their own clergy or justice of the peace, though she keeps a list of local officials for brides to contact.

"I grew up thinking the only place to have a wedding was in a church, so I have been surprised how much people enjoy outdoor weddings," says Norton. "One concern we had was people being respectful of the property, but they have been great, rarely having anyone run through a flower bed."

Norton advises anyone thinking of a similar venture begin with a good insurance policy. She suggests having paved paths to direct people to the ceremony for the benefit of women in high-heeled shoes after a rain.

"High heels aerate the grass nicely, but it doesn't do much for the shoes," she notes. Parking remains in a mowed area near the gardens. Norton does plan to expand her gardens and add statuary over time. For now, she and her husband stay busy with what they have.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Gary and Mary Ann Norton, 26062 Olinda Trail, Lindstrom, Minn. 55045 (ph 651 257-6072; website: panolavalleygardens.com).



Post and beam shelter provides a place to go when the weather does not cooperate. The Nortons built it from scratch, using timbers from old barns and grain elevators.



There are nearly 8 acres of beautiful gardens and landscaped areas for wedding ceremonies.



Carlson's basic 20 gauge steel caskets start at \$660. They would sell for nearly \$1,700 at a typical funeral home.

### He Sells Caskets As A Sideline

Bill Carlson of Scholls, Oregon buys caskets direct from manufacturers and then sells them directly to the public for about half of what funeral homes charge.

The idea for the sideline casket business was hatched about two and a half years ago when a friend suddenly passed away. Carlson helped the widow buy a casket.

"I wanted to get a lower price for my friend by ordering one through the internet," Carlson explains. "It was a little nerve-wracking because we didn't know if it would get there in time and look as good in reality as it did on the website."

It got there fine and looked good but to eliminate the stress, Carlson set up a Portland area storefront to offer caskets. He's proud to be able to offer a low-stress, economical alternative to the bereaved.

"I am still offended by the high casket

prices charged by funeral homes. Families are faced with a double loss. First the emotional loss of a departed loved one, then the financial loss imposed by the funeral home," he says.

"We want consumers to take back control of funerals and funeral items," Carlson says. "Funeral law states that funeral directors cannot refuse or charge a fee for a casket supplied by the consumer."

Carlson's casket prices start at \$660 for a 20 gauge steel model (which would normally command a retail price of nearly \$1,700) to \$2,249 for solid Cherry models (which would sell for \$4,200 or more).

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Pacific Caskets, Bill Carlson (ph 503 644-3465; email: info@pacificcasket.com; website: www.pacificcasket.com).

### They Pay Cash For Old Barns

You can get cash for old barns from a Minnesota company that's found a market for timbers, siding, and floorboards.

Big Wood is one of a number of companies that makes a business out of finding new uses for old wood. But not every old building is a keeper, warns co-owner Dave LePage.

"You need a good roof over the structure," he explains. "Half the barns we look at are either too dangerous to take down, or the effort wouldn't be worth the quantity or quality of the wood you would get."

LePage looks for good siding and notes that old 12-in. vertical boards have more value than horizontal siding. What he really prefers to work with are the worn hay-loft floors and even roof boards which, if in good shape, have their own beauty.

"There is a lot of elbow grease involved in taking down a barn if it's done right," he says. "In dismantling a barn, you do it in reverse order to assembly - taking off the roof, then the purlins and siding. We use a crane to take down the superstructure. It's dangerous work and involves a lot of equipment and labor."

If you find a buyer for your barn, make sure you have a contract before they start work, adds LePage. He points out that even if the old wood in a barn has a retail value of \$10,000, it might not be worth more than \$1,000 standing.

"If it were my barn, I would make sure



Dave LePage looks for good siding, hay-loft floors and roof boards.

the guy has good insurance," advises LePage. "Watch out for people who will pick the carcass, taking the barn boards and leaving you with a dangerous skeleton."

LePage and his partner Mike Nicklaus use recycled timbers to build timber frame structures for clients. They like not having to worry about shrinkage from green timbers, and they like the appearance of old, sometimes hand hewn timbers.

If you have an old barn or other building you are considering tearing down, they may be interested. You can send them pictures or digital images. "It's great to get contacts from people trying to save old building materials and not just have them pushed into a hole in the ground," says LePage.

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