Ken Riley and Harold Ellis have been together for 34 years—and now also months into married life. Riley and Ellis were married May 10 in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, which has become the “marriage capitol of the South,” Riley said.

“Friends called and said get down here,” to city hall on a Saturday this past May, Riley said. “Harold was still at home; I was in town gardening. There was a lot of back and forth and the city clerk said she was not going to issue licenses, [so] people started leaving. We encouraged people not to leave, and it got to the point we were inside because of how many had just walked away. We went back outside and started a protest chant.

“There was a little controversy of our way of handling it, but as I explained [at the time], ‘We all have our own way of handling things, and this is my way of handling stuff like this.’” Within minutes an officer came to the door and said they were going to open up.

“We let everyone [who] we knew [was initially] ahead of us back in line. We were very lucky that we were the sixth same-sex couple married in the Bible Belt, by coincidence, we also were the sixth couple to be registered domestic partners in the South.”

Riley, 59, was born in Chicago’s Roseland neighborhood and spent his last 17 or 18 years together for 34 years, former Chicagoans finally marry

BY ROSS FORMAN

Ken Riley (left) and Harold Ellis. Photo courtesy of the couple.
Expert tips to plan your wedding expertly

BY FRANK J. ANDONOPLAS

Flowers are a huge part of any wedding. You can spend a little, you can spend a lot. It all depends on how important this is to you, as well as what your budget will allow. This is where your wedding consultant will assist you coming up with a design that works best for you. Here are the key parts of the wedding that need flowers, with some great options I’d like to recommend for any budget.

Personal flowers are the first thing you need to consider. Brides can go with a traditional hand-tied round bouquet of all tight blooms, which has been popular since Martha Stewart made this vogue 20 years ago. It’s timeless and simple. Or they can go with an interesting cascading shape of a crescent or oval. I just had a bride recreate her grandmother’s bouquet from 1928. They were HUGE back then.

For bridesmaids, I’d recommend something smaller, or, to save money, even one grace single stem. Moms lately seem to not want to wear a corsage so I have been doing small boutons of berries or herbs—or go a completely different route by wearing a brooch.

The largest expense will be decor flowers. Let’s start with reception. Centerpieces are where the costs add up big time. When selecting these, think about the overall feel of the wedding, and where you are having it at. If it’s a hotel ballroom, I’d recommend a mix of elevated arrangements and complimenting lower arrangements. By mixing these formats with the same flowers, it will not only add interest to the room, but save you money as the lower will be less expensive than the elevated, as you need a lot of volume.

If you are in a more casual environment such as a loft or even your home, think about one single vase or even a collection, with each vase having a different type of flower in it. (Having the same color is called monobotanical.) You can tell your florist—if you are not picky—to set a price point, and to just the “the best of market” and have them decide on what type. Also consider a grouping of small vases with a single stem that will double as a favor for guests to take home. You can go entirely with candles, but make sure the flames are in glass to meet fire codes. Also, using non-floral elements such as props or edible centerpieces (such as a small wedding cake) saves money. Again, this must fit your theme and or overall feel of the wedding. I love the words “unexpected” and “out of the box,” which are my calling cards.

When selecting flowers and decor for your ceremony, I have one word I keep in mind: REPURPOSE. Think “How can I use these at the reception, to save money?” Centerpieces on rented pedestals create an amazing aisle. Large statement pieces flanking your ceremony can be relocated to each side of your orchestra or head table or can be used as centerpieces for your escort card or sweet tables. If you are making a huge impact, and I feel is money well-spent. Then, if the budget allows, I love to do a pattern on the dance floor created with light. Also, a lit room perimeter creates a dramatic feel, and can change color during the evening. Again, this must fit your theme and or overall feel of the wedding.

If the budget allows, I love to place a bud on each napkin. Small arrangements for the restrooms and bars (as well a bowl of nuts for guests to munch on while waiting for a drink) are nice touches as well. One more thing to consider is lighting. You have these beautiful flowers, and once the room gets dark you will lose the beauty. I highly recommend pinspotting each table, with a light focused directly on each centerpiece. This makes a huge impact, and I feel is money well-spent. Then, if the budget allows, I love to do a pattern on the dance floor created with light. Also, a lit room perimeter creates a dramatic feel, and can change color during the evening.

For more information and images, www.frankEventDesign.com or “FrankEventDesign” on Facebook.
Notes from Diamond Don

BY DON STRZEPEK

First, let me say congratulations on making the decision to get married to that most important person in your life—your wife or your husband. Now for some facts. How to choose the right engagement ring and wedding bands? Do you both get engagement rings? What type of metal should you get? Where should you shop? And how much should you pay?

Let me answer these questions as best as I can. The right engagement and wedding bands should be not only a symbol of your love and commitment, but a very open display of your individuality and personality. You are not going to settle on a cookie-cutter style, therefore, find a jeweler who is willing to listen and know about you and your partner. This will not happen on the Internet. The best thing you can do is shop local and make buying rings part of the overall fun experience.

Should you both get engagement and wedding rings? I think so. Why not? Shout out to the world that you are going forward with your lives together. I think the embracing of giving rings to each other is more than a display. Ring giving is an emotional statement. Remember, we are creating trends and traditions like never before.

What type of metal should your rings be made of? The answer is simple. Stay with the finer metals that work well with your lifestyle and type of work you do. I am going to say avoid the alternative metals. I know they are trendy but they really are just street-fair type of costume jewelry. You both deserve the best for this lifetime expression. The right type of metal is silver, gold or platinum.

Where should you shop? I strongly recommend that you shop local. Shop with a true professional jeweler. Shop at a place where you can establish a personal relationship. Shop with a jeweler who cares about you and the moments in your life. Shop at the places that have always embraced you and will continue to do so.

Finally, How much should you spend? That answer is simple. If you want quality jewelry, do not just shop price point. Low pricing is often a sign of mass-produced and poor quality product. I would not even call that jewelry. Fine jewelry is quality made at affordable pricing. So the answer is to buy what is comfortable for the both of you. Remember, you are going to be wearing it for a lifetime.

Now get shopping. Diamonds are a woman’s best friend and now a man’s best friend as well.

Don Strzepek is the owner of Tucker, Inc. Stop by 5 S. Wabash Ave., Suite 507; visit www.tuckercompany.net or call 312-263-3317.

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‘First Comes Love’ book takes look at LGBTQ love

Available Sept. 26, First Comes Love (Soliel Press) is a new coffee-table photo book that celebrates the lives and enduring relationships of LGBTQ couples from across the United States.

The brainchild of Philadelphia photographer Barbara Proud (aka B. Proud), the book is just one element of the “First Comes Love” Project, a traveling exhibition of photographs, stories and video interviews documenting LGBTQ couples who have been together 10-50 years. Visit www.firstcomeslove.org.
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The vision has come to life. Now envision gathering your guests in an elegant bi-level penthouse loft at Thompson Chicago. Or on a terrace with the Chicago skyline and Great Lake waterscape daring you to look away. Perhaps an intimate private dining room is more your style—or an opulent space for up to 150 of your dearest friends. All are within reach, nourished with the exquisite culinary expertise of Nico Osteria’s own James Beard award winner, Paul Kahan.

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Sosin-Oeser

Former Windy City Times senior news reporter Kate Sosin (in glasses) married Alicia Oeser, surrounded by family and friends July 12, in Rindge, New Hampshire. It was a small, joyous ceremony.
A Chicago reception is in the works.
Photos by Felix Rust Photographers
Ellis, 68, is now retired. They moved to Arkansas in 2006, as it was “time to slow down,” Riley said. Now married, Riley joked that he now “even walks different.”

“I always said, ‘After all these years [together] what difference is that [marriage certificate on] paper going to make, [but] I cried during that short ceremony and realized I love Harold as much today as I ever did.’”

So how did they meet?

“It truly is a fish tale.”

“In working at New Town Aquarium [in Uptown],” Riley said. “Harold was the census taker for the blocks around [that area]. We talked for a few minutes, [and then] he mentioned he did stained glass. I said I would like to see it, so he gave me his number—and I started calling as soon as he was out of sight.”

When they later talked, it was the start, officially.

“We spent the first few months reassuring each other that they are not the one, then one day in the garden one of us said, ‘Maybe I wouldn’t mind growing old with you,’” Riley said.

Both have fallen in love with Eureka Springs, too.

“There aren’t any gay bars, per se [in the city], but there are drag shows, and allegedly there are more LGBT per capita here than any place else,” Riley said. “Back in our day, we were very active in Chicago. We were the plain-tiffs in the first felony hate crime prosecuted in the state, and the city council passed a resolution honoring the things we did there. We did the Marches on Washington, the March on the United Nations, [and more]. Harold and I have a few buildings in town, but we live on Beaver Lake, about 39 minutes away.”

Riley is on the board of directors for the Eureka Springs Gay Business Guild, “and Harold helps me with my commitments,” Riley said.

“Really, these homosexuals’ agenda is to keep moving outward and showing people, sometimes one person at a time, yep, we are all humans.”

“Eureka Springs is just a great place for people to live: it’s not just that a lot of gays have settled here. We have four diversity weekends a year; we do have a men’s resort, but no gay bars. It’s almost like watching an experiment sometimes. Look, all I can tell you is, I spent my first 50 [years] in Chicago, and have not been as comfortable as I am here. The natural beauty of this area is outstanding; Beaver Lake is amazing. Being near Bentonville, which is the world headquarters for Walmart, has helped to homogenize the areas outside of Eureka Springs as well.”

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**Paciga-Stevens**

Chicago couple George Paciga and Jerry Stevens got married at City Hall on July 12—on their 35th anniversary. Judge Donna Cole officiated the ceremony.

Photo courtesy of Paciga

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**Bailey-Knight**

Jim Bailey (left), event designer at J & L Catering, and Windy City Times film critic and Scrooge & Marley co-writer/director Richard Knight Jr. are pictures with their “son” Barney on July 16 (Knight’s birthday) just after converting their July 2011 civil union to a marriage.

Together for 17 and a half years, the couple ironically met during an engagement party on which they were both working (Jim as the caterer, Richard as part of the band providing entertainment). The couple celebrated their new status with a fancy dinner—a subsequent summer garden party for friends—and have upcoming formal dinners planned for both sides of their family.

“We have waited a long time to make it legal so we’re taking advantage of every opportunity to celebrate,” Knight commented between sips of champagne.

Photo by Rusty Schwimmer
Hartwig-Chaille

Marek Hartwig (Chicago-based bridal stylist and owner of MAREK Bridal) and Ron Chaille (owner of Chicago-based advertising agency, arch Advertising) celebrated their marriage with a reception March 28 at the Chicago Cultural Center.

The couple, along with their 270 guests, enjoyed scrumptious fare provided by Blue Plate Catering and danced the night away to fabulous music provided by The Larry King Orchestra, celebrating their marriage.

The actual marriage took place Feb. 15 on the rooftop of The Andaz in West Hollywood, California.

Other specifics of the reception included:
- Event Designer/Decor: Erin McDonald of Platinum Events
- Floral: Janet Gallagher Designs
- Caterer: Weddings by Blue Plate-Ken Severin
- Cake Pops: Ta-Dah Pastries
- Suits: Custom Burberry
- Entertainment: Larry King Orchestra
- Video: Larry Wayne of Evolution Films

Photos by Jai Girard Photography
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Forde-Zipter
Kathy Forde (left) and Yvonne Zipter, who have been together for more than 26 years, converted their civil union to a marriage in a ceremony July 5, 2014, at the Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago, where they both work. The ceremony was officiated by author Sara Paretsky in the presence of many family members and friends.

Photos by Eric A. Rogers

Spaanstra-Barnes
Amanda Spaanstra (brown hair in right photo) and Carmen Barnes are to be married Aug. 16. They have been engaged for a little more than a year and are looking forward to sharing their lives together. Their wedding website is http://www.theknot.com/wedding/Carmen-and-Amanda.

Photos courtesy of Barnes

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