

# From Simple to Sumptuous — Local Caterers Serve Up Wedding Feasts

By Julie Jacobs

If you're engaged and looking forward to a wonderful wedding day, don't get tied up in knots about tying the knot and planning your reception. With a little forethought, organization and knowledge about today's wedding scene, you can have a memorable celebration.

According to many caterers, wedding receptions tend to be more moderate

affairs as compared to weddings of a few years ago, with guest lists coming in at 100 to 150 people.

"Receptions used to be larger. In recent years, we've seen the number of attendees drop from 200 to 250," says Konstantine Garyfallos, banquet manager for Pantagis Renaissance in Scotch Plains. "I attribute this mainly to economics and the fact that dad no longer always pays for his daughter's wedding. The bride and groom often foot the bill themselves."

Many cost-conscious couples do much of the work themselves, rather than hiring a wedding planner. Another increasingly popular cost-cutting trend includes holding the reception on a Friday evening instead of on Saturday or Sunday. "Fridays have definitely picked up a bit, because the cost per head is lower," points out Alex Eldefry, banquet manager at L'Affaire in

Mountainside. "Typically, you can save around 20 percent."

The per-head cost at any catering hall depends upon what day the reception is held (Saturday evening is the most expensive), the types of food and brands of liquor served, the number of courses and add-ons — specialty stations during the cocktail hour and

Viennese dessert tables. In some cases, the cost can go up based on the particular facility room you book.

In general, the basic package includes a cocktail hour, open bar, two beginning courses, the main entree, cake and coffee. Many couples find this surprising, but a buffet costs about the same as a sit-down meal. Eldefry explains that while there may not be as many servers, buffets offer greater quantities and variety of food. The per-head cost for sit-down or buffet can range from \$50 to \$60 on the low end, \$60 to \$80 with a moderate budget, and \$80 and up for a high-end gala.

Most caterers require either a flat rate or a percentage as a deposit when the contract is signed. By law, you have three business days to cancel an agreement and receive a full deposit refund. After this grace period, however, some caterers do not grant refunds under any circumstances.

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