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COMMUNITY

Science center offers bridal budget bliss

By Rivers Janssen
 Emerald Editorial Editor

The Springfield Creative Mind Science Center doesn't go out of its way to attract attention. Housed in an ordinary storefront, it sits next to a sports card shop.

There is no huge sign above the building, no tinsel to attract attention.

Only one thing divulges the center's main purpose: a spray-painted sign next to the door that says "Wedding Chapel."

Rochelle and Jeff Richey were the lucky ones Saturday, Feb. 27. More than 50 guests showed up for the Richeys' wedding; some came in formal attire, and others dressed in blue jeans and Nikes.

A couple of friends set up the stereo that played the wedding march and made sure the tape was fully rewound. The best man looked calm. He waited for the ceremony to start before taking off his sunglasses.

In the hour leading up to the wedding, Rev. Joan Mawhirter was the busiest person in the chapel. She ran circles around the guests, making sure everything was perfect — from the food for the reception to the lighting at the altar.

Mawhirter is the only full-time employee, although helpers drop by sometimes. She was too busy to don her black robe until just a minute before the ceremony.

Finally, at 2:24 p.m., Rochelle and Jeff were pronounced man and wife.

Mawhirter runs the Springfield chapel as an affordable alternative to high-priced church weddings. At only \$50 to \$75, a couple can get married in the presence of up to 100 guests.

As Mawhirter says, a couple



Courtesy photo
 Rev. Joan Mawhirter conducts the wedding as Rochelle and Jeff Richey exchange vows during their Feb. 27 ceremony.

can have the ambience of a real wedding (unlike courthouse nuptials) without mortgaging their house. And because it's the only chapel of its kind in the Eugene-Springfield area, an increasing number of people are taking advantage.

Since opening the chapel in November, Mawhirter said she's married about 40 to 45 couples, including 10 during the Valentine's Day weekend. On busy days, like Valentine's Day or Easter, weddings can be scheduled as close as an hour apart. However, she won't book them any closer than a half-hour.

Her chapel has been receiving

more attention since a New Year's feature in *The Register-Guard*, and has attracted widespread attention from other media, including coverage in newspapers from Seattle and San Francisco.

Mawhirter said the chapel has another 40 weddings lined up from now until September.

Jeff and Rochelle were attracted to the chapel because of the low price. After a nearly four-year engagement, they decided to use the bulk of their money for the honeymoon rather than the wedding.

"This is nice because it's affordable and pretty at the same

time," Jeff said.

On a stage on one side of the chapel with ribbons decorating the wall behind it, the couple gets married. Sitting over to one side is an organ — it costs an extra \$20 to use — and in the back is a three-foot fountain, with water cascading into a small pool at the base.

Although most couples go to the chapel to get married, Mawhirter isn't tied down to in-house weddings. She will travel to other people's houses or gardens if they ask, provided it's within reason.

"I don't know that I'd go to a tavern on Saturday night," she said. "That might be too risky."

Mawhirter also conducts Sunday services for those who follow religious science, adding to her responsibilities on wedding days. She doesn't usually, however, include denominations in the ceremonies. That's because about 50 percent of the couples come to her chapel because churches won't marry them, she said.

Those individuals often are from different religions or have had children out of wedlock.

Whatever the problem, Mawhirter takes care of them.

"I don't worry about things like that," she said. "My ceremonies are more spiritual than religious."

Mawhirter's low-key approach to weddings has provided for some memorable moments. She once had to stop midway through a garden wedding to put out a fire a guest had accidentally started.

Mawhirter's had a few instances where the bride didn't show up. During one ring exchange, she was given five rings by the groom.

"I told him he was going to have to pick one," she said.

COMMUNITY UPDATE

Clay, paintings exhibit to open

The Springfield Museum will feature Mexican-style clay masks, pottery and paintings commemorating the 17th-century Salem witch hunts in a combined exhibit called "From the Center," on display through April 3 at the Springfield Museum, 590 Main St.

The clay masks and pottery are by Lynda Jasso-Thomas, and the paintings are by Janet McLaughlin. A public reception for the artists is scheduled from 7 to 9 p.m. today at the museum.

"Jasso-Thomas has done extensive research

on the Mexican tradition of masks made for religious and other ceremonies," said Kathy Jensen, museum director. "And McLaughlin's paintings, which commemorated last year's 300th anniversary of the Salem witchcraft trials, are a powerful reminder of the power of fear and prejudice."

Although admission is free, a \$1 donation is suggested for adults. The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Friday and noon to 4 p.m. Saturdays.

Celebration seeks designers

Graphic designers and design teams are

invited to submit portfolios of samples of their work for consideration in the selection of the designer for the 1993 Eugene Celebration poster and ancillary graphic design services.

The poster should convey the tone and breadth of this event and is the basic graphic design from which other products, such as T-shirts and pins, are developed.

Portfolios will be accepted Friday, March 19 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the administrative offices of the Eugene Public Library, Recreation and Cultural Services Department at 22 W. 7th Ave. For more information, call 687-5215.

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