

## Pride of the bride

Wedding planner can make your day

By JENNIFER PARKS, EDMONTON SUN

Actress Jennifer Lopez played the deft organizer of society nuptials in the 2001 film, *The Wedding Planner*. Then reality shows like *Exchanging Vows* and *For Better or Worse* captured the imaginations of brides-to-be with the message that wedding planners aren't a luxury reserved for the rich and famous, but fall within anyone's budget.

Ever since, brides across North America have been seizing the chance to enjoy their special day without the headaches and stress of running the show.

"It's the least you can do to make your life easier on a day you've dreamt about since you were five and played dress-up," says Edmonton wedding consultant Jolyn Saramaga, who launched her own company, Nuance Occasions, three years ago, after giving up nursing.

Business is booming, she says, still wound up Monday after working at the Edmonton Bridal Expo at the Shaw Conference Centre on the weekend.

Ten years ago one in 100 Canadian weddings were professionally co-ordinated.

Today that number has grown to one in 20. In the U.S., one in every two couples books a wedding planner. Most overseas resorts and banquet halls also have full-time wedding coordinators on site.

According to the Wedding Planners Institute of Canada (WPIC), wedding planners typically charge about 10% of the total wedding cost or a flat fee of about \$2,000 per wedding.

The average cost of a Canadian wedding is \$20,000 in cities and \$15,000 in rural areas.

"It takes a lot of the work out of having a wedding and can be a great stress reducer for the couple so they can sit back and enjoy their special day," says Danielle Andrews-Sunkel, owner and co-founder of WPIC, the only wedding co-ordinator certification institute in Canada.

Andrews-Sunkel left a job in finance three years ago, got certified with a U.S. wedding consulting institute and opened the Wedding Planners, which is now the largest company of its kind in Canada.

Two years later, she launched WPIC in response to the dozens of e-mails she received from people wanting to know how to get into the profession. So far the institute has certified more than 80 people across Canada.

They are holding a course at the University of Alberta on Oct. 16 and 17, which is expected

to draw participants from Calgary, Vancouver, Winnipeg and the Edmonton area.

Andrews-Sunkel says the session is geared toward anyone serious about learning what it takes to become a wedding co-ordinator and be certified.

"Anything and everything to do with weddings will be covered," she says.

Topics include bride and groom psychology, the history of wedding co-ordination, the phases of planning a wedding, setting up a business, etiquette, how to make invitations, different ways to decorate and working with vendors.

The wedding planner's job is to help streamline the bride and groom's search for everything from a wedding venue and caterers to a DJ and photographer, and to manage all other wedding details, says Saramaga.

Come wedding day, the planner must be a mirror of calm while keeping the show running smoothly despite inevitable glitches.

"No wedding is perfect," she says, having been through a photographer cancelling at the last minute, a bride with stage fright and a tornado warning at an outdoor wedding.

"That's not for my couples to worry about. It's up to me to sort things out," she says. "But I love the challenge."

The great reward is helping to make a couple's most important day memorable - seemingly perfect - despite drunk relatives, lost bouquets, a missing wedding cake, runs in nylons, rambunctious ringbearers and DJ difficulties.

"If I show stress it all falls apart," she says.

She carries an emergency kit with her that contains items like duct tape, club soda for stains, extra hairspray, breath mints and backup wedding bands, "in case the best man isn't the best man at doing his job."

Cheryl Johnson from Calgary says she's excited about taking the WPIC course in Edmonton next month and breaking into the industry.

"It's something I've always been interested in. I've never had more fun than I had planning my own wedding. I'm also a really creative person, and organized, so it's a good fit," says Johnson.

"You get to work with people on one of their most important days."

The cost of the course and certification is \$750. To register, visit [www.wpic.ca](http://www.wpic.ca) or call 1-866-836-4617.