

**The New York Times**  
nytimes.com

June 11, 2006

FIELD NOTES

## This Wedding Is Brought to You by...

By **HEATHER FLETCHER**

HERE'S the bride and the bridegroom, and now for the first pitch.



After dating for just three months, Dave Kerpen and Caroline Fisher brainstormed about having a dream wedding that they did not have to pay for.

Recalling that moment two years ago, Mr. Kerpen and Ms. Fisher, both 29 and sales and marketing professionals from Little Neck, Queens, asked themselves, how do ordinary people have a sponsored wedding, the kind of over-the-top event — remember Star Jones's wedding? — where merchandise and services are traded for publicity and advertising?

Ms. Fisher and Mr. Kerpen wanted an extravaganza, and they are getting one, complete with a 7,500-seat stadium, dozens upon dozens of roses and 3,000 bride-and-bridegroom bobble-head dolls.

But affording it was another matter.

Ms. Fisher, a single mother and a sales manager for WBLI, a radio station in West Babylon, N.Y., said she couldn't afford a big wedding and couldn't ask her parents to pay for a second \$40,000 wedding ceremony when her first marriage lasted little more than two years. And Mr. Kerpen, an eighth-grade teacher at Intermediate School 237 in Queens, wanted hundreds of guests to see him marry Miss Right.

So on July 8 after the Brooklyn Cyclones baseball game in KeySpan Park, 500 guests and an expected crowd of 7,500 ticketholders will view an otherwise traditional Jewish ceremony with a \$100,000 price tag, brought to them in part by the Cyclones, [1800flowers.com](http://1800flowers.com), the Broadway Mall, the Staten Island Hotel and Entenmann's.

"This was an event to sell, our wedding," said Ms. Fisher, who with her fiancé, also runs a marketing consulting business that bears his name. "And also to reduce the cost significantly."

This comes at a time when the national average cost of a wedding is \$28,000 (far more in New York City), according to the Condé Nast Bridal Group. The notion of a sponsored wedding now has so many followers that simply offering a captive audience of guests is no longer enough to beguile sponsors into donating cash and products. Brides must have an angle, something that will generate publicity.

And because sponsored brides also need to have a thick skin to cope with traditionalists who find these brand-name weddings crass, the mission for money can seem daunting.

"It really takes away so much of the beauty and dignity of a wedding," said Peggy Post, the etiquette expert and great-granddaughter-in-law of Emily Post. "You will find some guests who will say it's tacky or crass."

Ms. Fisher is not fazed by such criticism. "Some people are so particular about what a wedding should and shouldn't be," she said. "Those people can have their weddings the way they want to."

Creating a sponsored wedding requires more than the love of a future spouse. It requires a love of sales. Antonia van der Meer, the editor in chief of Modern Bride, said she was aware of one bride who dedicated up to 20 hours a week to creating the wedding she wanted.

"It's just a lot of knocking on doors," Ms. van der Meer said. "You really are running sort of your own promotional campaign."

Christina Fanizzi of North Akron, Ohio, was confident enough in her sales skills to negotiate sponsorships for her July 1 marriage with George Crosier. She has already swapped advertising space on her 175 guests' programs for \$5,000 white gold wedding bands and her diamond engagement ring, a \$1,000 gown and a \$250-an-hour Lincoln Navigator stretch limousine. She will pay only \$3,000 of the \$15,000 price tag.

"I have a huge Italian family, and there's no way that we could've just had a little wedding," Ms. Fanizzi said. "No way."

Ms. Fisher and Mr. Kerpen have left only the ceremony as off-limits to advertisers. They were, however, in league to compete for a larger share of sponsor dollars than Ms. Fanizzi, with the possibility of thousands more onlookers and a baseball-theme event, which already has television networks dialing their number.

The couple ensured that sponsors, like the Broadway Mall in Hicksville, N.Y., which donated the bobble-head dolls, worth \$12,000, and the shop that donated \$5,700 in bridal gowns and bridesmaids dresses, would get creative exposure in ways other than being included on the couple's wedding Web site, [www.ourfieldofdreams.us](http://www.ourfieldofdreams.us), and on the ballpark's giant video board. During the game, there will be promotional activities, like picking the best-dressed fan to receive free formal wear from a sponsor.

All the attention is making 1800flowers.com happy. In return for providing Ms. Fisher and Mr. Kerpen \$3,000 worth of red roses for the ceremony, 1800flowers.com will receive advertising exposure like having its logo displayed on the ballpark's scoreboard and the tossing of 25 bouquets of miniature red roses to fans and wedding guests during the game.

"We're not looking to sponsor weddings in general," said Steven Jarmon, a spokesman for 1800flowers.com. "We just think this will be a buzz-worthy event."

AirTran Airways is so accustomed to solicitations from brides that last year it honored 4 out of 229 requests for sponsored weddings, said Tad Hutcheson, the vice president for marketing and sales. In 2000, AirTran received about 40 inquiries from brides and granted 2. With the increase, Mr. Hutcheson said, inquiries must have a creative hook that will prompt news media coverage.

Last year the airline chose a needy couple, two couples willing to travel newly opened routes and a fourth who had met while flying on AirTran. The airline tries to ensure the requested travel includes the honeymoon, which is the most likely sponsor gift to be mentioned in the news media.

"It basically generates awareness in the market that we're there," Mr. Hutcheson said.

Ms. Fisher and Mr. Kerpen, who are spending only \$25,000 for their \$100,000 wedding, added another twist to the event: donating to a favorite charity. They plan to give 10 percent of their cash gifts to the [David Wright Foundation](#), a nonprofit organization started by the Mets third baseman, which focuses on multiple sclerosis and children's causes.

BUT, alas, for some, the charitable giving doesn't override the garish affair. In addition to breaking every rule of etiquette, said David Popenoe, a director of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers, the sponsored wedding is alarming in other ways. His project researches and analyzes data about American marriages.

"To turn human intimate activities into market-oriented affairs is ultimately destructive," Mr. Popenoe said. "You're expressing the desire for a lifelong bond. That has really nothing to do with the economic angle, one hopes."

Mimi Kerpen, 86, the ballfield bridegroom's grandmother, warmed quickly to his sponsored wedding. After all, in 2003, he was in "Paradise Hotel," a short-lived dating reality show on Fox. "We're kind of used to David being different," she said.

Ms. van der Meer, the editor of Modern Bride, said company logos are commonplace now and, naturally, nuptials would follow. "I think it's just in our culture," she said. "This is an era of corporate sponsorship. Weddings very much reflect on what is going on around us culturally."

[Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [XML](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)

---