

# Commitments

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The visitors center at Independence Grove in Libertyville served as the banquet facility for the March wedding of Holli Hall and Jason Stella.

PHOTOS BY PAUL VALADE/DAILY HERALD, MARCH

## A scenic stroll down the aisle

### Forest preserve offers lush setting for nuptials

BY EILEEN O. DADAY  
Daily Herald Correspondent

Like so many contemporary brides, Holli Hall of Schaumburg dreamed of an outdoor wedding in a garden filled with lush flowers, overlooking the water — with a clear view of the sunset.

Sound like she was destined to marry on the beach in Waikiki? Think again.

For her special day, she and her fiance, Jason Stella of Schiller Park, found a secluded spot right here in the Chicago area, that caters to wedding couples in search of paradise.

"We wanted something different than the typical reception in a banquet hall," says Hall, a dental hygienist at practices in Schaumburg and Arlington Heights.

"It felt as though we were getting married in a tropical paradise."

Holli Hall

felt as though we were getting married in a tropical paradise."

This so-called "newest natural treasure" of Lake County, is beginning to attract more attention as a wedding venue.

Since its opening as a banquet facility last year, when Stewart Glass, owner of Catering by Michael's, was tapped to handle the food service, the grove has transformed itself into an elegant oasis.

"The word is out, calls have been pouring in," he said.

As it is, the indoor event facility, called Audubon Hall, is located at the highest point in the preserve, offering a panoramic view of the 15-acre Independence Grove lake, its marina and beach with its floor-to-ceiling panel of windows.

A lush garden located at the southeast edge of the lake features a picturesque setting filled with flowers and foliage native to Illinois. A fountain, wooden gazebo, benches and red brick walkways complete the garden vista.

This native garden can accommodate an outdoor ceremony, as it did for Hall and Stella on May 23. The setting can be filled with chairs and features a wireless sound system.



The botanical garden in the Des Plaines River Valley brings beauty of nature to the ceremony.

Typically guests then move to the lake's observation deck, where they enjoy the cocktail reception overlooking the lake and marina.

"That was what people liked, seeing the water and having a clear view of the sunset," Hall said. "It was perfect."

Glass agreed, adding that the cocktail reception on the veranda overlooking the lake and beach is unlike any other wedding venue he can think of in the state.

"What seems to attract people here is the water, and the chance to have the ceremony outdoors," he said, "or at least the perception of being outdoors, with all the windows."

During the cocktail reception, Glass' staff hand-picks hors d'oeuvres, that run the gamut, including Cajun crab and avocado maki rolls, puff pastry kisses with brie, pecans and brown sugar, spicy chicken eggplant potstickers and Peking duck rolls with miso sauce.

The majority of weddings held at the grove so far have been seated banquets, Stewart adds, with couples taking advantage of the separate cocktail reception leading into the formal meal.

His plated entrees are as diverse and elegant as his hors d'oeuvres, with most couples choosing a combi-

nation of chicken or beef coupled with a fish selection.

One of his most elegant choices features char-grilled medallion of tenderloin with cabernet reduction and Chilean sea bass filet atop an herb risotto cake topped with saute of spinach, mushroom and tomato concasse, all with roasted garlic tomato cream sauce.

Pricing for the garden setting ranges from a \$6,000 minimum food and beverage bill for a Friday and Sunday event; to a \$12,000 minimum for a Saturday affair.

Although the venue is ample enough to fit 250 with a 900-square-foot dance floor, and up to 350 without a dance floor, it can handle only one wedding at a time.

A few dates remain open this summer, Stewart adds, with active booking going on for summer 2004 and even as far out as 2005.

Catering by Michael's has served as the prime caterer for venues that include Park West, the Harold Washington Library and the Chicago Cultural Center.

It also received the Jean Banquet Award this year as the best caterer in Chicago.

Still Glass sees Independence Grove as unique among his venues.

"It's a bride's fantasy," he said. "Every bride wants to be surrounded by flowers and overlooking the water."

### Getting published in Commitments

Welcome to Commitments, the monthly section celebrating our readers' anniversaries, weddings and engagements. Commitments is published the third Sunday of each month as a supplement to the Daily Herald.

• Fill out a form: Call the Daily Herald to request engagement, wedding and anniversary forms and fee schedules at (847) 427-4495. Or stop in any of our offices, listed below. Forms can also be found at [www.dailyherald.com/commitments](http://www.dailyherald.com/commitments).

• Deadlines: Forms and photos must be at the Herald 30 days before our publication date, which will be the third Sunday of each month.

• Photos: We'll use good quality color or black-and-white photos studio photos or snapshots are both acceptable. When choosing a photograph, do not send a picture taken with a soft lens, a computer scan or a photocopy as we can not guarantee the quality of the reproduction. Photographs must be wallet size or larger, and will be returned after the publication date if a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed. For anniversary announcements, we encourage you to send us both wedding and recent photos of the anniversary couple.

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Chef Shane Miller of Events at Independence Grove serves up chicken piccata.

### Independence Grove Forest Preserve

• Independence Grove is in central Lake County near Libertyville. Entrance and parking areas are on Buckley Road (Route 137) east of Milwaukee Avenue (Route 21) west of River Road.

• In the valley of the Des Plaines River, Independence Grove offers outdoor recreation and education

on a 115-acre lake reclaimed from a gravel quarry.

• The facility is open daily from 6:30 a.m. to sunset. Parking is free for Lake County residents. Parking for nonresidents is \$5 per car Monday-Thursday, and \$10 per car Friday-Sunday and holidays.

• Events at Independence Grove, a Catering by Michael's Company, offers

menu options from plated dinners to cocktail receptions and themed stations.

• For more information, contact Independence Grove Forest Preserve, 16400 W. Buckley Road, Libertyville, IL 60048, at [dsteams@co.lake.il.us](mailto:dsteams@co.lake.il.us) or (847) 968-3499 or fax (847) 918-9017.

• Contact Events at Independence Grove at (847) 247-1111 for reservations.