INSIDE: Take a deep dive into the latest local wedding trends.

SOUTH COUNTY

OCTOBER 2023

ONE WITH NATURE

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A season worth waiting for

We’ve got to be honest. For a while there, it didn’t look like the summer would ever end.

With mid September seeing the highest temperatures of the year, we were starting to worry South County might not have much a season in between the hot heat of summer and the cold of the upcoming winter.

And that would have been a shame because fall is, without question, one of the best times to be in Southern Rhode Island.

That’s why this month, we’re all in on the theme of “Fall in love with South County.”

Of course, before we jump into the season with open arms, it’s important to reflect on the summer that was and the ways in which our area is changing and that’s exactly what reporter Rachel Philpson did in “Smooth Like Butter,” a profile of two local residents who made quite the name for themselves this year with a new business that took South County by storm.

It might be a while before Eily and Rosie McGowan turn Buttercup Coffee Cart into an all-year adventure but, if there’s one thing we know, it’s that they made the most of every opportunity they had this year.

And that’s what we hope you do throughout the fall. To help, reporter Liz Boardman asked a slew of local residents about their favorite places to go and things to do in South County each autumn.

Some of the answers in her story “Fall Aboard!” are no brainers — I mean, who would dare miss the corn maze at Clark Farms? — but other are deep cuts sure to please both longtime residents and visitors to the area hoping to make the most out of the season.

In addition to Boardman’s story, one of our favorite activities this month is featured in our cover story as reporter Bill Seymour dives deep into the world of bike riding in Southern Rhode Island.

It’s a simple concept. Who doesn’t love a good bike ride when the weather is great? But whether you’re an experienced rider or a weekend warrior looking to step up your game, South County has plenty to offer to those willing to hop on two wheels and get rolling.

Besides activities, one of the other reasons we love fall in Southern Rhode Island is because it is, without a doubt, peak wedding season and whether you’re going to a friend’s big day just to enjoy the open bar or you’re a bride or groom making a life-changing vow to your partner, weddings are some of the best events you can attend in the fall.

In “Don’t Mind If I Do,” we take a look at some of the newest and hottest trends for couples walking down the aisle in 2023. Some of them are noble, like the goal many couples have for more environmentally-friendly days, and some are just downright brilliant, like the decision some couples are making to opt out of bland reception food in favor of more creative and tasty options.

Lastly, we take a look at a trend we sure hope takes off at weddings in 2024 and beyond: Live painting.

For local resident Coley Sheldon, a life spent painting has paid off in a new business venture: capturing once-in-a-lifetime moments for brides and grooms and we hope this new trend to make your wedding moments last a lifetime sticks around for a while.

So there you have it. A look at some of our favorite things this fall.

Thanks for picking up this edition of our magazine. We hope this season proves as fun for you as is possible.

Now, if you’ll excuse us, it’s time for apple cider, flannel pajamas and all the things that make the fall the absolute best time of year.
PDCC set to host the 8th annual Pumpkins with a Purpose drive throughout October

The Pumpkins are coming! The Pumpkins are coming!

If it’s fall in South County, that means it’s officially time to celebrate “Spooky Season” and there’s no better, or more rewarding, way to get into the Halloween spirit than a trip to Peace Dale Congregational Church for the annual Pumpkins with a Purpose sale.

For the eighth consecutive year, PDCC will host its annual pumpkin sale, with this year’s event running every day from October 2-31 from 10 a.m. until dusk.

An estimated 5,000 pumpkins and gourds will arrive by truck at Peace Dale Congregational Church, located at 261 Columbia St. in Wakefield, from Navajo agriculture in New Mexico for the church’s 8th Annual Pumpkins with a Purpose Sale — transforming the front lawn of the church into a Pumpkin Patch.

The net proceeds from the sale will be donated to Welcome House of South County to help with their work to end homelessness in South County.

The proceeds support the beds open to homeless people in Rhode Island at the shelter. Included in the support is case management on a person-by-person basis, paying case managers, costs for transportation to doctor’s appointments, job interviews, the Social Security Office and housing appointments.

Welcome House has also run a daily soup kitchen for its residents and others and works to assist individuals to find more long-term housing, which could include placement in some of Welcome House’s rental apartments.

According to Wally Young, organizer of the event, over the last seven years, the community’s support of the Pumpkin Patch has resulted in almost $60,000 being donated to Welcome House.

“We are truly grateful for this support,” Young said. “Every purchase will make a difference in someone’s life.”

Seen on the church lawn from late September when the pumpkins arrive until Halloween evening, Young wears his traditional orange pumpkin-styled baseball cap stamped with “Pumpkinhead.”

He can remember the name and size of many pumpkins over the years.

“Some are the size of tennis balls, some the size of cantaloupes, others the size of softballs and some are giant size,” he said in a past interview.

“Our pumpkins measure in dollars, not in inches, and that is very unique,” he explained with a laugh about how the fundraising works. A plastic tape measure goes around the pumpkin from the beginning to a stopping point to determine the cost.

Traditional orange pumpkins of all shapes and sizes will be offered for sale. They are priced by size ranging from $1 to $35. There is no extra charge for white, red, green and grey heirloom pumpkins. There will also be several varieties of unique decorating gourds in all shapes and sizes priced from $1-$4.

Cash, check and credit cards will be accepted.

In addition, PDCC is hosting a special event called Pumpkin Palooza at the Pumpkin Patch on Saturday, October 7 from 11 a.m.-2 p.m.!(Rain Date Saturday, October 14th.) Pumpkin Palooza is a community party will feature pumpkins, a White Elephant Sale, Bake Sale, hot dogs and entertainment.

Meg Kolodziej, Volunteer Youth Connect Coordinator, is organizing Children’s Activities for Pumpkin Palooza which will include a Halloween Obstacle Course, Trick or Treat Candy Hunt, Pumpkin Roll, and more. Pumpkin Palooza is free and open to the public.

For more information, visit peacedalechurch.org.
At the end of their first summer season, co-founders and sisters Eily and Rosie McGowan are looking back in awe at how their family-owned business Buttercup Coffee Cart has been able to bring their delicately crafted beverages and treats to the South County community.

On July 12, Buttercup Coffee Cart officially opened, welcoming patrons to the one-of-a-kind, brightly colored renovated horse trailer turned coffee cart. Eily and Rosie, along with their mother and fellow co-founder Mary McGowan, said they are delighted to see patrons fall in love with the charm of the renovated horse trailer (and their tasty menu) as much as they have.

“It has been a dream so far,” Eily and Rosie McGowan said in a recent interview. “It has been so rewarding to see our hopes and aspirations for Buttercup Coffee Cart come to life this summer.”

Buttercup Coffee Cart is proud to be a family business. While Eily, Rosie and Mary run the day-to-day of the cart, the sisters said their extended family has been “extremely helpful and supportive” with the upkeep of the business. Eily and Rosie McGowan noted their sister Nora created their logo.

Eily and Rosie McGowan entered 2023 looking to open a new business. What they didn’t expect was it taking off right away. Take a look inside Buttercup Coffee Cart, one of South County’s newest seasonal favorites.

Story by Rachel Philipson
and comes on weekends to help with baking, as well as their cousin Brian, with his barista experience, who comes to the cart to help out during shifts.

“Founding this business alongside loved ones has been incredible,” Eily and Rosie McGowan said. “We work well together so we build off of each other’s ideas easily. Running a family business has ensured that we have a strong support system and backbone for Buttercup Coffee, both critical for any new business to become successful.”

The initial idea for Buttercup Coffee Cart was years in the making, the sisters said. Rosie created a Pinterest board where she has been continuously saving photos of “charming cafes that emulated her visions for a future business.” Rosie’s entrepreneurial background and Eily’s prior experience as a barista led the pair to start thinking that it was highly possible to bring their own coffee business to fruition.

Starting this year, the McGowan sisters said they worked with their mom to figure what steps it would take to bring their dream to reality — with the goal of opening for the summer.

It was a long journey to bring Rosie McGowan’s Pinterest board to life, the sisters said. The McGowan family said it was a steep learning curve understanding the behind-the-scenes of starting a business, such as licensing, health aspects, plumbing, but it was worth every second. From opening day to present day, they said it was a joy seeing their vision come to life.

Once they completed the necessary procedures, the sisters said they had the fun of deciding on a yellow horse trailer for their cart — and countless yellow accessories.

“We decided a renovated horse trailer would be perfectly suitable for our coffee cart as it was just the right amount of space and had an added charm factor,” the sisters said.

Beyond the yellow horse trailer, the most noteworthy part of Buttercup Coffee Cart is their selection of food and drinks. On the menu, they mainly sell coffee drinks like hot/iced coffees and lattes — with a long list of flavor syrups to go with them. The sisters said their most popular syrups have been their caramel, lavender and brown sugar cinnamon.

As a nod to a popular TikTok trend in 2020, Rosie McGowan had the idea to add “whipped coffee” (also known as dalgona coffee or hand beaten coffee) to the menu. This coffee drink has equal parts instant coffee powder, sugar and hot water whipped until it’s creamy.

For non-coffee drinkers, they are also in luck, as the menu also includes lemonades (such as their popular lavender and rose flavors), matcha and chai.

Buttercup Coffee Cart also sells fresh baked goods every day, including muffins, cookies and scones. The sisters said their regulars have shown their appreciation for their coffee cookies and peanut butter and jelly cookies.

While a typical day on the cart may start the same, the sisters said every day serving the customers always ends up a different, delightful experience.

The three McGowans wake up around 6:30 a.m. to start the coffee urn and pack what they need from the fridge and freezer for the day. They aim to get to the cart at around 7:15 a.m. to get powered up, load the fridge and set up their supplies and yellow decorations.

They open at 8 a.m., which they do six days a week (they are only closed on Wednesdays.) Once the cart opens, that’s when the fun begins.

“Weekends are especially busy if it’s a nice beach day, whereas weekdays may be slower, and we will have more time to chat with...

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customers as they come,” Eily and Rosie McGowan said.

The sisters said the community responses have been amazing, ranging from the support of the town recreation manager to other welcoming local business owners. They said the best part of running a local business is starting to befriend their regulars and truly becoming a beloved facet of the South County community. They added that talking with their customers is one of the most rewarding parts of going to work each day.

“Getting to know the people is one of the greatest things about having a small, local business because we feel like we are really able to make a connection with all of the people we serve,” Eily and Rosie McGowan said. “We have a lot of interesting conversations with customers each day because people are intrigued with the idea of a business like this.”

As for the future of Buttercup Coffee Cart, both Eily and Rosie McGowan said they had a great experience running the cart during the summer, and they look forward to running the cart as long as they are able to in future years.

“We’ve learned so much in such a short amount of time so it will be really rewarding to come back and have some prior knowledge and experience under our belt to be ready to go as soon as the summer starts and to keep improving,” the McGowan sisters said.

A seasonal business that is only open during the summer at the moment, Buttercup Coffee Cart is located at 316 Atlantic Ave in Misquamicut, Rhode Island. Their hours this year were from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. on weekdays (excluding Wednesdays) and 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. on weekends.

To see their menu and learn more about the behind-the-scenes of Buttercup Coffee Cart — and to see when the business opens for 2024 — follow their social media channels, Instagram (@Buttercupcoffeecart) and TikTok (@Buttercupcoffeecart)
SOUTH COUNTY locals are letting you in on a secret: Fall is one of the best times to be here.

“Fall is the best time to visit South County,” says Louise Bishop, president and CEO of South County Tourism. “There’s a lot to do from hayrides and corn mazes at local farms to Wickford Wicked Week and, of course Atlantis Rising – the only sand sculpture competition in Rhode Island. There’s a lot of spooky history and haunted places to visit. Did you know the vampire that inspired Bram Stoker’s Dracula is buried right here in South County?” Bishop is referring to the grave of Mercy Brown, who died of tuberculosis in 1892, when the disease was not yet named. Instead, poor Mercy was thought to be a vampire, and the legend of her death and exhumation and mutilation of her body became a legend, and is thought to have inspired Bram Stoker to write “Dracula.” You can visit her grave in Chestnut Hill Cemetery in Exeter.

Another spooky happening is the Witches Paddle in Wickford Harbor, the kick-off to Wickford Wicked Week. Dress as a witch, warlock, goblin, or ghoul, (costumed pets are welcome too), for a fun paddle around the harbor, and costume contest. It’s Oct. 22 from noon to 2 p.m., starting at Gardner’s launch on Pleasant Street. There is spooky fun in Wickford all October. When it comes to fall’s most popular attractions in South County, there are few that attract a crowd year after year the way the corn maze at Clark Farms in Matunuck does. With a new theme each fall, it’s an activity that’s always worth exploring, as the crowd above did with the “Escape from Alcatraz” theme in 2021.

Summer might be the most popular time to visit South County but when it comes to the BEST time of year to visit? Locals know that distinction belongs to autumn. Check out some of our favorite ways fall for fall in Southern Rhode Island this year.

Story by Liz Boardman, Photography by Michael Derr

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week, culminating with the Horribles Parade.

But fall in South County isn’t all about spooky stuff. Here are some suggestions from South County residents.

Take a hike and do some apple picking at Narrow Lane Orchard, followed by a cheeseburger Club at Gregg’s. Then take a walk on South Kingstown Town Beach to finish off the day. – Adam Crowe.

If you go:
• Narrow Lane Orchard, North Kingstown | narrowlaneorchardri.com
• Gregg’s Restaurant & Tavern, North Kingstown | greggsusa.com/north-kingstown
• South Kingstown Town Beach, Matunuck | https://southkingstownri.com/575/Town-Beach-at-Matunuck

“Now that many of the tourists are gone, bike around Block Island, with stops along the way at South Lighthouse, Mohegan Bluffs and Painted Rock. Stop for lunch at one of the many restaurants, and race up to North Light. Ride back to Town Beach for a swim in the warm ocean waters, then head back for an ice cream at Aldo’s Bakery while waiting for the ferry ride back.” – Bill Boardman

If you go:
• Block Island Tourism Council | Blockislandinfo.com

“Walk from State Pier #5 (the rocks behind Monahan’s) along the Narragansett Beach wall, then stroll along the beach to the Narrow River and back. It’s beautiful, free, and the scenery constantly changes!” – Liz Prager O’Brien.

If you go:
• Narragansett Town Beach | www.narragansettri.gov/323/Narragansett-Town-Beach

“Park at East Matunuck State Beach and
South County has long been home to some of the most fun activities for those celebrating the Halloween season. One of the fall’s most beloved events, the Wickford Horribles Parade, even helped launch the official Rhode Island Witches Guild.

head west and up the steps through Matunuck. Then warm up and/or have a snack at the Ocean Mist.” – Deb Bergner

If you go:
- East Matunuck State Beach | riparks.ri.gov/beaches/east-matunuck-state-beach
- The Ocean Mist | www.oceanmist.net

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“Go to the Farmer’s Daughter for pumpkins and mums. Then drive to Narragansett Pier and walk along the sea wall. Have lunch at the Coast Guard House for good food and amazing ocean views.” – Sandy Burrows

If you go:
- The Farmer’s Daughter | /www.thefarmersdaughterrri.com
- The Coast Guard House | https://thecoastguardhouse.com/

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“Spend an afternoon on the deck at WinterHawk Vineyards. From the monarch

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Need some more ideas? Faye Pantazopoulos, creative director at South County Tourism, recommends:

Places to stay
- General Stanton Inn | www.thepeneralstantoninn.com
  It’s newly renovated and has been thought to be haunted for centuries. It’s got beautiful new rooms with luxurious bedding, the tavern serves delicious food and drinks, and it’s close to Charlestown Breachway for beach walks and centrally located for events all over South County.
- Weekapaug Inn | weekapauginn.com
  The inn offers casual luxury on Weekapaug Pond. Luxurious rooms and suites, and you can go on outdoor excursions with their naturalist, or hop over to their sister property, Ocean House, for a wine class or cooking class, spa, dining and more.
- Shelter Harbor Inn | www.shelterharborinnri.com
  A cozy and luxurious inn located in Westerly with the Farmhouse Kitchen + Bar for indoor and outdoor dining (weather permitting).

Get outdoors
- Atlantis Rising International Sand Sculpture Competition | www.southcountyri.com/atlantis-rising
  At Misquamicut State Beach the weekend of October 6-9, you’ll see stunning sand sculptures, and enjoy live music, food trucks, pirates, and a drone light show.
- Check out the area’s farms, Clark Farms, The Farmer’s Daughter and Manfredi Farm for their Halloween-themed events, hayrides, corn mazes, apple cider, apple cider donuts and more.

If you go:
- Clark Farms | clarkfarms.com
- The Farmer’s Daughter | www.thefarmersdaughterri.com
- Manfredi Farms | www.facebook.com/thecornplace

The fall is also a great time for hiking, kayaking and looking at foliage. To learn more:
- Walking & Hiking | www.visitr.com/southcounty/walking-and-hiking
- Foliage | www.visitr.com/state/foliage

If it’s raining (or even if it’s not) check out these museums and attractions that remain open after Columbus Day.
- Biomes Marine Biology Center | biomescenter.com
- The International Museum of World War II | wwwiiifoundation.org
- Living Sharks Museum | www.livingsharks.org

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butterflies in the north terrace butterfly garden to the very social wine tastings on the back patio, everyone can find a moment of bliss.” – Rick Dyer, owner of WinterHawk Vineyards

If you go:
- WinterHawk Vineyards | www.winterhawkvineyards.com

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If you go:
- WinterHawk Vineyards | www.winterhawkvineyards.com

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A TIME OF REFLECTION

Fall is the perfect time each year to slow down from life’s hectic pace and get back in touch with your roots. In fact, it’s as easy as riding a bike.

Jay Sutton, of North Kingstown enjoys the sunset during an evening bike ride on a recent evening in Wilson Park. For many of South County’s residents, the fall is often the best time of year to reconnect with nature through bike riding and several local shops make it easier than ever before to find like-minded riders to hit the road with.

Story by Bill Seymour, Photography by Michael Derr
While the beach may lose its allure for some as more mild days replace summer heat and humidity, it is still an excellent time to enjoy bicycle riding throughout South County.

Backroads, a bike path and even town streets can take you around parts of South County you’ve never seen. It could be a relaxing and exercising peddle on a sightseeing tour.

“Love riding to the lighthouse and back, 18 miles each way from my house. Like the route due to the wide shoulders and the scenery,” said Paul Rasleski about his trip into Point Judith.

Whether it is your first time or one of countless peddling through South County, it could be a twist on Dr. Seuss’s book, “Oh, the Places You’ll Go.”

The variety

Those seeking satisfaction of being outdoors and taking in the change of seasons might like Matunuck, Green Hill and Charlestown with their stretches of road along farm fields.

There’s also a combination ferry trip to Block Island and then riding along its semi-rural roads followed by a Caribbean-flavored bake in the fall sun at Ballard’s in Old Harbor.

If rural isn’t your thing, there’s the oceanfront, starting under the Towers in Narragansett, traveling along the seawall and down winding ocean road past old majestic large houses or new contemporary ones recently built.

It eventually will take riders to Scarborough State Beach, where a short stop, walk along the sand and return to the road can add fun during those warm days.

In North Kingstown, winding through and around Wickford can bring many inviting sites of old houses along this waterfront.

Wickford village is built around one of the most well-protected natural harbors on the eastern seaboard. It also features a collection of 18th-century houses for those who like a little history along a trip.

Mid-fall is just the right time to see the leaves turn as they flutter to the ground in an afternoon trip on William C. O’Neill Bike Path’s 14.4-mile round-trip run from the Kingston train station to the Narragansett Community Center and back again.

If it’s a peaceful ride through woodland, marshes and the swamps at an arm’s distance, then this ride is for you.

Kevin and Denise Miller, of East Greenwich, who recently moved to Florida where they can ride all year, also loved fall riding in South County.

“I did bike well into the fall utilizing Route 1 A from Wickford to Narragansett as well as Goddard Park, Ives Rd and Quidnessett which all demonstrate fabulous color,” she said recently.
A few years ago, this biking couple noted what they liked about the O'Neill bike path. “You have a bathroom at one end, there’s a town along it and there’s something to see, like ponds and woods,” Denise said at the time.

The path also has a cut-off to the University of Rhode Island that brings a bicyclist along many winding streets, paths and roads weaving among fraternity houses, academic buildings, stadiums and dormitories.

While the O'Neill bike path caters to those who like paved surfaces, Jay Behringer, 53, of North Kingstown, is a dirt road rider. “I like the crisp air and I also like the foliage. Gravel riding—the surface is more compacted in the fall and less dusty,” he said.

“If you want the best colors out there, there’s nothing like riding a gravel road, leaves changing and never seeing many—if any—people along the ride,” he said, pointing out that many rural unpaved roads can be found in Rhode Island whether in South County or elsewhere like Cranston, Scituate and Coventry.

Some people like to ride in groups and appreciate the company of others. Often, though, many said that they worry about their skill levels and don’t want to embarrass themselves.

Still, more prefer the solitary ride for centering themselves or finding much sought-after alone time. “I typically ride alone simply due to my start time, however, I occasionally ride in groups. If a group, meet up at Wilson Park or Park n Ride on 1A near Plum Point Bistro,” said Rasieleksi.

Steven Tymon of Wickford has been biking for more than 65 years, logging thousands of miles. “Riding is more of a mental almost spiritual experience for me rather than exercise for physical fitness. I have ridden with friends and groups, but I prefer being alone,” he said.

Rent-A-Bike
In addition, others are intrigued about riding, but don’t do it often enough to invest heavily in a new bike.

Three local bike shops offer rentals as well as purchases for low-cost and high-end bikes. These include the growing number of “ebikes” that are battery-assisted for almost gliding along if you want some to reduce your energy output.

These full-service shops are Mythic Bike Works (mythicbikeworks.com) at 1207 Kingstown Road, Peace Dale, and Stedman’s Bike Shop (stedmansbikeshop.com) at 196 Main St., Wakefield and NBX Bikes (nxbikes.com), 922 Boston Neck Road, Narragansett.

Stedman’s is the oldest among the group. The W.E. Stedman Co. has been a fixture on Main Street for almost 100 years. Originally owned by his father, William “Bicycle Bill” Stedman, his son Everett took over the shop in the 1950s and became a fixture in the local biking community until he died in 2016 at 90 years old.

Stedman’s and NBX offer organized rides for everyone from the beginner wanting a casual trip to the more aggressive racers. Check their websites for meeting times, place places and dates they are offered.

Meanwhile, Mythic sponsors a “ramp room” at the Peace Dale Mill Complex at 1425 Kingstown Road in South Kingstown.

“We offer riding sessions, but we also offer camps, clinics, training, private events, things like that,” said Case Charkowick. He and Mythic owner Mike Galoob oversee it.

“We had a whole bunch of local kids who were hanging out at Mike’s shop all the time,” Charkowick said in a recent interview. “And as the weather was starting to get cooler, we were wondering where these kids were gonna go every day after school.”

Through the summer, NBX Bikes in Narragansett sponsored what might be best called the “cycling equivalent of NASCAR” races in Charlestown at Ninigret Park with a criterium or “crit” in bicyclists’ lingo.

From May through late September, every week it offers specialized races on a dedicated cycling track. It has smooth pavement and is level with several corners and flows well.

However, that’s a ride for those looking for a specific thrill. The shops post on their websites the days and times of their rides, but with the fall comes shrinking times of daylight. They report that they continue for as long as possible for the afternoon rides and then move them to mornings, possibly on another day in the week.

It is best to check with the shop when planning the fall ride to know the schedule and time for the group you want to join. There’s never a shortage of places to ride, either.

“It’s great to ride either in the woods or the road,” added Jay Cerullo, who does both, likes the cool weather for comfort.

Tymon said his favorite place to ride is Gilbert Stuart Road, with few motor vehicles using it and a clean and smooth surface.

“It is the perfect place to enjoy a crisp fall afternoon ride when the fall foliage is peaking. I also ride the paths around Bellville Pond on my mountain bike. The foliage there is spectacular and for me. It is more of a spiritual exercise than a physical one,” he said.
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Fall is the most popular time of the year for couples in South County to tie the knot. But, that’s about the only thing traditional about today’s nuptials. Take a look at the latest, and coolest, wedding trends of 2023.

Story by Liz Boardman

Something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue? These days, South County weddings are more like “anything goes.”

“Couples are letting go of traditional wedding rules and planning weddings that are more reflective of their personalities,” says photographer Elizabeth Watsky.

We asked South County wedding professionals to tell us the trends they are see for the rest of 2023 and beyond.

* Elizabeth Watsky (elizabethwatskyphotography.com)

As a photographer, I have observed the following current wedding trends:

- Big Weddings are back! Micro weddings had their moment but big weddings are back in a big way.
- More sustainable weddings. Couples are looking for ways to make their weddings more environmentally friendly, such as using recycled materials or choosing a venue that has a green certification.
- More personal weddings. Couples are incorporating more personal touches into their weddings, such as using their own vows, having a custom-made wedding dress or

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repurposing their mother’s dress, and using custom art for invitations.

- More unique weddings. Couples are looking for ways to make their weddings stand out from the rest, such as having a themed wedding or getting married in a unique location.

* Joy Rich (Flowerthyme, flowerthyme.com)
  Half arbor structures and more color and more of a wildflower, natural look. A few years ago, everything was blush and white, so it is wonderful to see brides wanting to use the local zinnias, dahlias and garden flowers! Soft blues, green, pale yellow and peach tones seems to be the most popular. The brides love to see anemones and ranunculus in their bouquets. Also, colored taper candles in glass chimneys are really popular, especially on the long farm tables for head tables.

* Isis Brighton (Isis Cakes, isiscakesri.com)
  The newest trend I have seen this summer is one large cake (35 inch diameter) as opposed to a traditional tiered cake. They serve over 150 people and are decorated with cream and fresh fruit. The other trend, at least for me this year, has been pressed edible flower decor. I press the flowers by hand and then they are applied to the sides of the tiers. It is such a sweet look that adds lovely color.

* Ashley Richer (ashleyricherphotography.zenfolio.com)
  My favorite trend that I have seen grow over the last two years is couples choosing to shy
away from the traditional wedding meals. I am seeing many couples choosing cocktail hour appetizers, main course, and desserts based off of what they truly love! Some of my favorites have been a French fry bar, taco station, wood-fire pizza, fresh pasta station, and of course — an ice cream sundae bar! I hear nothing but rave reviews from guests (and vendors) at these weddings. It seems the consensus is that we are all loving the change up to the traditional wedding cuisine. Let’s keep this trend going!

* Elaine Godfrey (Weedweavers, weedweavers.com)

Very natural, just picked looks are in. The summer blue and white hydrangea look is traditional with white roses, ranunculus, lisianthus and other seasonal blue flowers. Each has its own uniqueness. Lots of white and greens of different shade gray greens are very popular with many varieties of eucalyptus. Dried flower weddings are coming into style. Sort of the boho look. A mix of fresh and dried flowers with lots of grasses. We have a few just dried flower weddings coming up. Fall is coming so bolder colors will be more popular. We always love it when a bride comes in with very different ideas and her own unique style, not afraid to be different. I think next year will have lots of pink overtones because of Barbie. I haven’t seen the movie yet but that’s what my intuition tells me.

* Faye Pantazopoulos (South County Tourism Council (southcountyri.com))

Sarah Cooper, the innkeeper of the Margin Street Inn in Westerly, tells us she is seeing a trend in hotel buyouts. For instance, Margin Street Inn consists of two houses, one will be the bridal party and the other the families and guests. Wedding weekends are also a trend — booking the wedding so it take place over a weekend or preferably a long weekend so that it’s a mini destination wedding.

Other trends she sees are lawn games, having the wedding start earlier in the day, say 3 or 3:30 p.m., and have an afterparty later in the evening, say 9:30 or 10 p.m. at another venue. In Westerly, The Café and Surf Cantina are known venues for these wedding after parties.

As far as décor goes, simpler is in — simple farm tables, simple yet colorful flower arrangements. And a trend I’m seeing a lot of is film photography as opposed to digital.

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Joy Rich flower colors - When it comes to bridal bouquets and other floral arrangements for brides getting married this year, soft blues, green, pale yellow and peach tones are popular, Joy Rich says.
If there’s one thing we know about Southern Rhode Island couples in 2023, it’s that they’re creating unique weddings that stand out. So, too, is Coley Sheldon, a local painter who can turn your day into a work of art.

Story by Bill Seymour

Allison and Alexander Webb, both 22, had the first kiss after their wedding in more than only a “Kodak moment.” It was something captured on canvas. In addition to transfixing time with videos and still photography, this couple sought to capture the picture-perfect scene with the help of Coley Sheldon of Wickford.

She came to their ceremony in an old industrial mill building with her brushes that blended in hues from the scenery and the couple’s locked lips that lit the canvas creatively in an heirloom to pass on years from now.

“The huge mill windows, the brick, the curtains, and the arch were painted so perfectly. Coley did an amazing job painting my husband and I as well, we love the way she painted my wedding dress,” said Allison of Ludlow, MA.

Warwick residents Carl and Katie Whitham, both 28, drew the eyes of their guests as they glided across the dance floor. Sheldon was there, too.

“Coley painted us during our first dance inside the Narragansett Towers. We were dancing to Love is Here to Stay by Frank Sinatra. It was magical,” said Katie.

A “live” painter coming to your wedding or event might spark curiosity and lots of chat.
afterward talking up the occasion, but also give you a special keepsake.

Right There, Right Now

“Live” means painting a scene or portrait right there, right now.

Yup, a painter like Sheldon paints live people in a moment in time, whether they are stars of the show or guests attending to celebrate the occasion.

“I’ve been painting for more than 20 years, but about a year ago I was introduced to the concept of live wedding painting and immediately knew that’s what I wanted to do,” she said in a recent interview.

“Weddings are the absolute best because all the key ingredients are present—a beautiful background, a couple in love, and lots of positive energy,” Sheldon explained.

As guests arrive, they will see the painting process unfold, which is often a bonus form of entertainment.

It draws the curiosity of guests as they see her perhaps appearing as did Jean-François Millet at Barbizon, Robert Wylie at Pont-Aven, Otto Modersohn at Worpswede, Heinrich Otto at Willinghausen, and Claude Monet at Giverny.

“Your guests will love watching your wedding unfold on canvas,” she tells those going to her website—coleysheldon.com—to learn more.

Then there’s the nostalgia. “All the feelings of your beautiful day will come rushing back each time you look at your painting. Your house guests will recognize the painting, too,” she said, noting it also is “custom home décor.”

In a way, the finished painting or watercolor art can become an heirloom hanging on a living room or dining room wall. The painting is ageless as time changes life around it.

Something Old, Something New

Since video and still photography are easy to do with cell phones, is this a nouveau art trend created in the 21st Century by a younger generation wanting to define themselves?

The answer is: No. The “live” painter has been around for a very long time. There was a time when plein air—outdoors—live painting was sought after and famous for capturing special moments of weddings, ceremonies, or receptions.

Before sales in 1913 put cameras in many people’s hands, live painting was an art form and commercial offering to people seeking that “Kodak moment” memorializing an event.

The artist must quickly capture the subject matter’s essence and translate it onto the canvas. It requires a great deal of skill and technical expertise.

The audience, on the other hand, gets to watch the painting come to life before their eyes. It can be a fascinating and educational experience, as they can see how the artist’s thoughts and ideas are transformed into a work of art.

There are many different reasons why artists choose to do live painting. Some do it simply for the challenge. Others enjoy the interaction with the audience and the opportunity to share their work more immediately. Still others see it as a way to capture life’s fleeting moments.

“For me, live painting is a stimulating challenge rather than a difficult task,” Sheldon said. She gives a demo of it on her Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/nicole.sheldon.102361.

It all begins shortly before the event starts.

“I arrive before the guests and paint the background, then take a brief video of the scene of choice and paint using a reference photo from that,” she said.

This allows for the wedding couple to move naturally but also allows her to move slowly through and pick their best angle, Sheldon explained.

As guests arrive, they will see the painting process unfold, which is often a bonus form of entertainment as curious guests watch the process and she answers questions.

“I will paint for six hours on-site and will take the painting back to my studio for finishing touches and protective varnish,” she added.

She brings professional art supplies, but will require access to an electrical outlet. If outdoors, she will need a place to work that has shelter from any harsh weather elements (direct sunlight, rain), she said.

There’s a bit of a different process for doing watercolor creations on paper for guests. A queuing approach kicks off who is first and after that is settled the work begins.

“Each painting will take nine-12 minutes on average. Depending on the number of guests and how many may be interested, not all guests may be painted,” she said.

“I will paint my heart out for the specified number of hours, painting as many portraits as time allows. I offer a discount card to any guests who were not able to have their portrait painted by the end of the night,” she said.

They pick up their custom watercolor of themselves at the event.

An Heirloom

Looking back at Sheldon’s work at their August Wedding, Allison Webb said it drew everyone’s attention.

“Our guests were floored by Coley’s painting. Our guests watched her paint during the ceremony and reception and were amazed by how quickly and beautifully the painting came together,” she said.

At Katie Whitham’s wedding in June, she heard and saw the same reactions.

“Practically all of our guests were very interested and in awe of Coley and the work she was producing. So many people had great interactions with her and thought it was awesome that she was there painting,” she said.

“Likewise, Katie and I had very positive reactions to her being there and the work she was doing. It truly added a great element to our wedding and our guests are still talking about her!” Carl said.

For wedding couples, they get professional-grade acrylic heavy-body paint on gallery-wrapped heavy-duty canvas and shipping is included or local delivery is provided.

Costs range from $2,000 for a 16" x 20" portrait to $2,600 for a 24" x 36" canvas of themselves. There are also less expensive prices for miniature paintings.

The guests’ artwork is 5" x 7" with professional-grade watercolor paint on cold-pressed watercolor paper. Pricing ranges from $1,500 for three hours to $2,250 for six hours. There are also less expensive rates for five and six hours.

“Your wall art couldn’t get more personal than this! Imagine a painting of your wedding day in your favorite room of the house,” Sheldon says on her site.

Carl Whitham agreed.

“We are looking for the perfect frame for it, but it is prominently displayed in our living room,” he said.

Write to Bill Seymour, a freelance writer covering news and feature stories, at independent.southcountylife@gmail.com.
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