

Here comes the wedding planner

Aspiring consultants at PB course learn dos, don'ts to preparing dream nuptials.

By **ROBERT JANJIGIAN**
Daily News Fashion Editor

It takes more than a flair for party organization to plan a memorable wedding. Just ask Carol Davis.

The Florida chairwoman of the Association of Certified Professional Wedding Consultants came to The Colony pavilion Monday to kick off an intensive five-day course — the first step in gaining certification as a professional wedding consultant.

The 15 students, many of whom already work in the hospitality trade, paid \$895 for the session sanctioned by the association. Davis, based in Boca Raton, offers the course in South Florida once a year, usually in August, which is her slow season.

Course participants, the majority of whom were women, came from as far away as Montana to learn how to plan nuptial celebrations and eventually get on the path toward earning their credentials as professional wedding consultants.

"The course is just the first step," Davis said.

In addition to Montana, the session's students flew in from Texas, New York, Illinois, Massachusetts and Alabama, with a few coming from North Florida as well as



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some from nearby, including three from The Colony itself.

"We want to step up what we're doing with regard to weddings," said Ruth Young, director of sales and marketing for The Colony, who was taking the course along with Lyn Kelly, the hotel's banquet manager, and Vicente Burlaos, food-and-beverage director.

"I expect that we'll all go for certification; it's something that will set us apart on the island," Young said.

There are no wedding consultants certified by the association on the island, Davis said.

Davis, who has planned several weddings at The Colony, according to Young, approached the hotel for her first island-based wedding consultant course.

"I thought it would be a positive for us to take the course and also to show off our facilities to some of these wedding consultants, who may want to book us in the future," Young said.

"We liked the idea of getting to know what the dos and don'ts are with regard to improving our wedding planning services."

The first "do" is attention to detail.

"It's all about details," Davis said. "Wedding consultants have to be consistent and are there to reduce stress and drama."

"Your job is like that of a therapist," she told the group on the first day of class.

The information provided

*Please see PLANNER,
Page A7*



Wedding invitations, wedding albums and thank-you notes were among the items on display at a professional wedding planners' class at The Colony, which drew 15 participants.

TIPS

Essential element

Carol Davis says professionally certified wedding consultants are a necessary component in putting together a successful event. They:

- Provide a stress-free wedding day.
- Maintain accurate financial records and budget.
- Negotiate contracts with suppliers and vendors.
- Save time.
- Provide access to reliable suppliers and vendors.

On the watch

The biggest mistakes wedding consultants (or anyone planning such an event) make are:

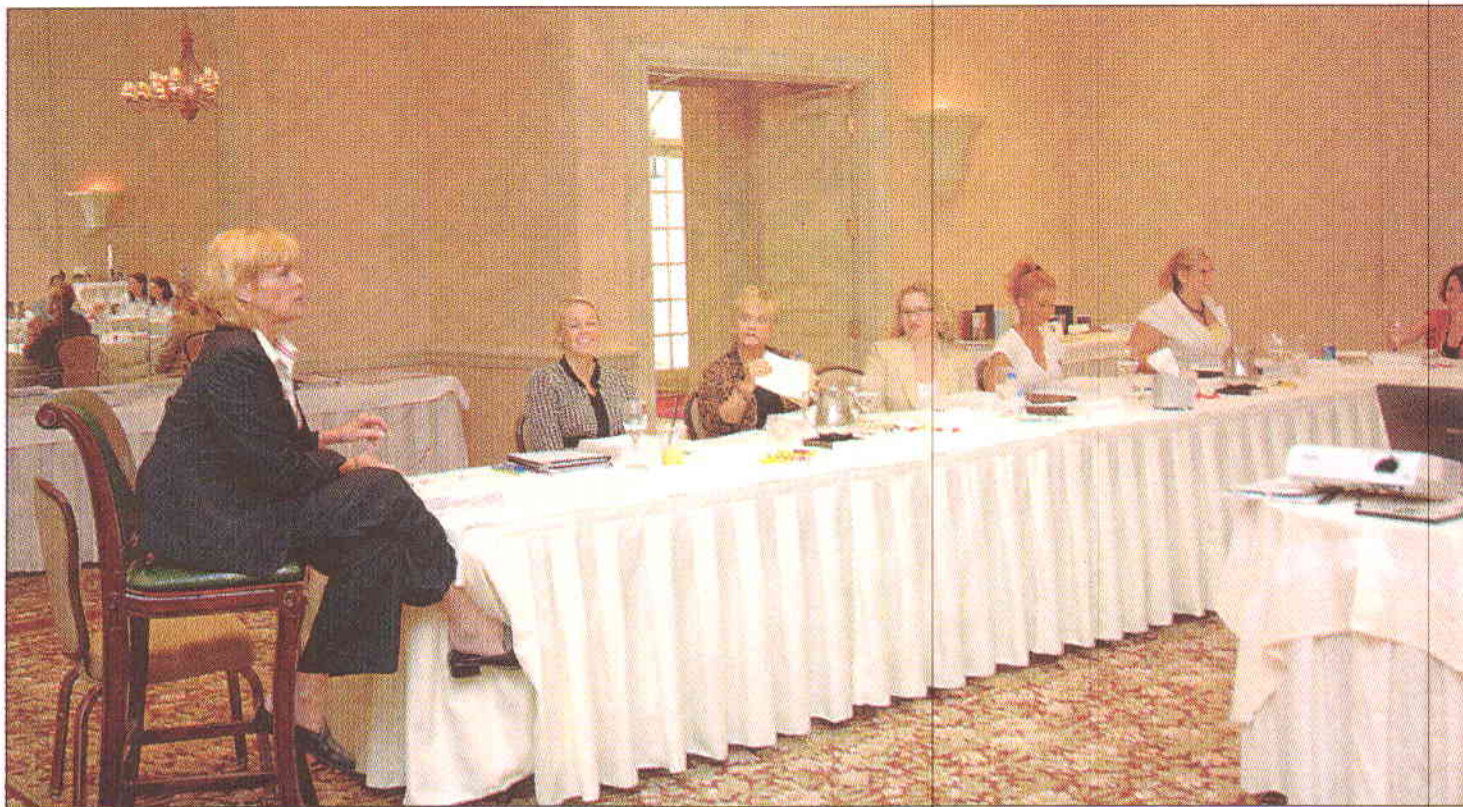
- Hiring a supplier or vendor because the price is right.
- Getting invitations out less than eight weeks before the event. Save-the-date cards can be mailed eight months to a year beforehand, especially if it's a destination-style wedding requiring travel.
- Having no schedule for the day of the wedding. "It gets everyone involved on the same page and there are no surprises, so the day goes, usually, smoothly," Davis said.

Wedding

Consultants 101

The qualities that make for a successful wedding planner include:

- Affinity for people.
- Listening skills.
- Ability to think on the fly.
- Detail orientation.
- Organization.



Daily News Photos by Lee Hershfield

Carol Davis teaches a course to aspiring wedding planners at The Colony. 'You have to make your clients be realistic about their budgets. For example, they may need to invite fewer guests or they may have to shorten the time allocated for a cocktail reception,' she said.

PLANNER

Topics range from marketing to reception site selection

From Page A6

in the course ranges from the practical — such as how to set up a business, negotiating with vendors, drawing up a boilerplate contract and determining what fee structure to establish — to the talents that make consultants essential for a seamless event, such as napkin folding, assembly of welcome bags and baskets, and knowledge of the changing rules of etiquette.

Topics covered in the 700-plus page binder that Davis hands out to each participant — “absolutely the Bible of the business” — include marketing, ceremony and reception site selection, catering, wedding attire, photography, videography, florists, music and entertainment, transportation, party rentals and decorations, invitations, rehearsals, and dealing with different faiths, traditions and cultures.

“I go over everything in the manual,” Davis said. “What it doesn’t cover, I cover in class. Everything I know, they’ll know by the end of the week.”

Davis has been in the hospitality business for more than 20 years and got involved with the association in 1999, first as a student while working as an event planner for the Boca Raton Resort & Club.

She founded her own firm, Events of Excellence, in 2001. A year later, she became the association’s South Florida chairwoman and began teaching the pre-certification course in 2004.

Davis is a cheerleader for her profession.

“We take care of the things bridal parties don’t have time for or knowledge about,” she said. “We know what questions to ask.”

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GOING PRO

The Association of Certified Professional Wedding Consultants, founded 16 years ago by San Jose, Calif., consultant Ann Nola, has more than 150 members in the United States. Members pay dues of \$200 a year.

To become certified, individuals must take a course offered by one of the organization’s instructors, coordinate six weddings and prove their success via letters of support and thanks from clients, plan a dozen additional weddings and do a research project for the association, usually related to resources.

Information about the organization is available at www.acpwc.com or by calling (408) 528-9000.

Carol Davis, the association’s Florida chairwoman and instructor, can be contacted at her firm, Events of Excellence, www.eventofexcellence.com, (561) 483-6844.