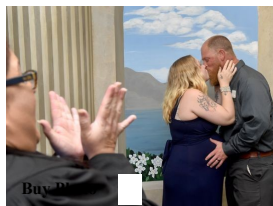


For Ventura County residents, Valentine's Day weddings are a 'reminder forever'

Megan Diskin, megan.diskin@vcstar.com, 805-437-0258

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(Photo: ANTHONY PLASCENCIA/THE STAR)

Noel Ulriksen held his new wife's pregnant belly when they kissed for the first time as a married couple Wednesday.

The hard-working Santa Paula man and soon-to-be father came directly from his job as a Ventura parks maintenance worker to marry his bride, Stevanna Grace, at the Ventura County Clerk's Office on Valentine's Day.

"I took an early lunch so we can do this on time and the time she chose," the 37-year-old man said, wearing his dark blue maintenance uniform and a matching tie.

His bride said Valentine's Day was chosen because of the sentiment behind the holiday but also to make it easier for her new husband to remember their anniversary.

They weren't the only couple thinking that way on a day that started out with a rainbow arching over the South Victoria Avenue building where the lovebirds were set to tie the knot.

It's a "reminder forever," said Faustino Sotelo, 37, of Oxnard.

[Fullscreen](#)

After 17 years and four children together with bride Hermelinda, 38, the pair got married. Although the ceremony didn't have butterflies,

"I am a little nervous," he said.

Officials with the Ventura County Clerk and Recorder's Office performed 30 weddings on Wednesday. There were 22 at the Ventura office and eight at the Thousand Oaks location, according to Miranda Nobriga, a spokeswoman for the office.

Apparently three couples may have gotten cold feet and were no-shows for their appointments, Nobriga said.

For \$158, couples get a marriage license, ceremony and certificate. They also get a chocolate candy bar with a special message from Lunn.

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At least two of Wednesday's couples were brought together by social media.

Johnny Cabral, 35, and Amy Smith, 41, started their relationship via Facebook. They didn't know each other, but when Cabral saw her profile come up online, he sent her a message.

After a four-year courtship, they recently moved into a new home together, which left them strapped for cash. They were engaged for about a year and last month told their family they planned to marry on Valentine's Day.

"Just makes it a special day — two in one," Cabral said.

Memorable scenes from
Valentine's Day nuptials



Johnny Cabral and Amy Smith, of Ventura, exchange vows at the Ventura County Clerk and Recorder's Office in Ventura on Wednesday. (Photo: ANTHONY PLASCENCIA/THE STAR)

As the Ventura couple's family waited in a reception area for the duo to get their marriage license, relatives offered some advice. Smith's 16-year-old son, Joseph Rodriguez, listened in.

"I think all the best things in marriage are free. Respect. Compliments," said Eileen Zuniga, Cabral's sister.

Zuniga's wife of seven years, Nancy Zuniga, said setting a good example for the kids is also important.

Cabral's mother said she knows the bride and groom are good together because of their shared love of thrift-store shopping.

"They both love to go to thrift stores, and you don't find too many women who love to do that. Or men, especially men," Carmen Cabral said.

Once the marriage license was finalized, the wedding party moved to a place in Lunn's office aptly called the "wedding room."

For the Ulriksens, an online encounter seemed to be a second chance at love.

The 25-year-old bride had gone through her new husband's check-out line at the grocery store. She thought he was attractive but didn't think she had a chance.

"I thought, 'Oh, there's no way he'd be interested in me,'" she said.

Read more: [Ways to celebrate Valentine's Day without breaking the bank \(/story/entertainment/2018/02/09/ways-celebrate-valentines-day-without-breaking-bank/1076139001/\)](/story/entertainment/2018/02/09/ways-celebrate-valentines-day-without-breaking-bank/1076139001/)

But then fate intervened, and the two came across each other on a dating app.

"They had both given up on finding someone special," said Karyn Grace, the bride's mother, who was beaming with excitement in the waiting area.

The Ulriksens told their family members about the upcoming nuptials a short time before it happened. The bride's father, Dave Grace, found out the night before the ceremony after he was picked up from the airport.

"She does that stuff," Dave Grace said of his daughter's knack for surprises.

He lives in Georgia and the bride didn't want him to miss her big day.

But he was also in town for another reason: His granddaughter is being born at the end of the week.

Before the ceremony, when the bride still shared a surname with her father, she said she'll be having a cesarean section on Friday and will finally meet

her daughter, Lorelei.

The groom's mom, Glenda Jackson, said it's her first granddaughter and she was surprised at the couple's calm demeanor, given all the life changes.

But the couple's support extends beyond their family.

The Santa Paula man's co-workers at his new parks job threw him a "daddy-to-be" shower and gifted him a rocking chair.

His bosses also surprised the couple at Wednesday's ceremony, bringing the bride a bouquet of pink flowers.

"We wouldn't have missed it," said Tom Martin, parks manager for the city of Ventura.

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