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# Something Old, Something New

Kelly Huegel and Jane Giles

With award-winning schools and parks, abundant shopping, and personal and professional service providers, it's no secret that Highland Park is a great place to raise your family. But less well known to suburban and city neighbors—and even to Highland Park's own residents—is that this special community is also really an exceptional place to plan and experience that single most important tradition of starting a new life together—the wedding.



Bride Leslye O'Neal with her bouquet from Floral Gardens

From uniquely special venues, world-class caterers, top-drawer florists, photographers, stationery shops, and spas for hair, skin, makeup and nails, to boutiques renowned for their dress, shoe, and gift selections appropriate for bridal party and guests alike, Highland Park and next door neighbor Highwood, have it all.

## The Beautiful Bride

Every bride dreams of looking and feeling her most radiant and glamorous-self the day of her wedding and pampering beauty treatments abound throughout these two communities. Among these is **Salon Volé** (1775 St. Johns Avenue, HP, 847-432-2640, [www.salonvolehighlandpark.com](http://www.salonvolehighlandpark.com)), where Anthony Volpentesta finds today's brides taking hairstyle cues from the “red carpet,” weaving flowers, sparkles or feather embellishments into their hair to achieve a romantic look. He also advised that tight up-dos, now out, are replaced by a softer, relaxed look for upswept hair. And by pulling out a few pins from soft curls, the bride can easily release her mane, literally letting her hair down for a less formal, post-ceremony reception.

At **Jen Z's** Beauty Services (2709 Waukegan Avenue, Highwood, 847-433-8401, [www.jenzsbeautyservicesinc.com](http://www.jenzsbeautyservicesinc.com)), a menu of head-to-toe beauty services are available. Owner Jennifer Zanotti advises bridal clients to book skin treatments, (waxing, facials, chemical peels and the like) well in advance of the big day. (No one wants red skin or other reactions lurking behind their veil.) Today's trends, said Jennifer, emphasize neutral colors and natural products. “But, don't be afraid to add a little pizzazz, like false eye lashes, which look great in photos,” recommended Jennifer. “Every bride's goal is to keep things simple and to accentuate her own natural beauty.” And whether showing off her bouquet or new ring, the bride's hands are bound to draw a lot of attention, making a professional manicure a must.

From the guests' perspective, their first glimpse into the wedding is the invitation. These often incorporate designs that convey the look (color scheme) and feel (formal vs. informal) of the event. According to Mayra Figueroa of **Paper Source** (490 Central Avenue, 847-266-6100, [www.paper-source.com](http://www.paper-source.com)) wedding invitations with visual dimension (layers, textures and fabrics) are popular as are custom lettering and logos, not just on invitations, but on menus, place cards, even on hotel baskets for out-of-town guests. Party favors can include personalized boxes filled with contents such as cookies or mini wine bottles with the couple's customized decorations and labels. A newer trend finds elegant cards designed in the wedding's theme communicating the couple's donation to a favored charity in lieu of traditional party favors. Another option is to purchase supplies from

PHOTO: James Spada



a well-stocked stationery shop and create the invitation and accompanying materials yourself. Newlywed Leslye O’Neal, who married last year in Highland Park, relied on the products and services of many Highland Park vendors, among them the Paper Source. Here she found all the materials she needed to design and hand-make her wedding invitations, programs, menu cards, seating place cards and thank you notes. Though she admits, if she had to do it over, she would be inclined to leave this rigorous task to the professionals.

## Picture Perfect Venues

If nature’s colorful serenity is your definition of a picture perfect wedding, Highland Park’s own **Memorial Park** is the quintessential romantic setting for an outdoor ceremony or photo session. The focal point of this location (405 Prospect Avenue—the grassy triangle at the intersection of Prospect and Laurel Avenues) is its charming gazebo set amidst the tranquility of a quiet residential neighborhood and situated conveniently close to downtown Highland Park. Memorial Park is one of 50 HP Park District parks and facilities. Another prime location, the **North Shore Yacht Club** (31 Park Avenue) may be the perfect alternative to a destination wedding. Imagine exchanging vows before a sunset on the shores of Lake Michigan. The Club’s cottage-like facility at Park Avenue Beach offers a cozy ambience that rents from May 1 through October 31. This intimate gathering spot

features a main hall, fireplace lounge, observation deck and kitchen. For more information about these or any park district venue, call (847) 831-3810 or visit its website at [www.pdhp.org](http://www.pdhp.org).

Highland Park is also home to several “hidden” wedding venues, such as the **Highland Park Community House** (1991 Sheridan Road, 847432-1515, [www.highlandparkcommunityhouse.org](http://www.highlandparkcommunityhouse.org)). Behind its distinguished white columns and French doors lies the lovingly renovated vintage charm of this historic landmark. Its spacious ballroom with arched ceiling, large bay windows and stage provide an elegant atmosphere seating up to 200 or with dance floor, 150 guests. There is also a large living room, newly remodeled powder rooms and a state-of-the-art commercial kitchen. Three beautifully landscaped gardens offer ideal spots for under-the-stars photo sessions. Newlywed Leslye O’Neal called the Community House the perfect setting for a dream-come-true wedding. “It was my vision for an elegant yet fun reception,” said Leslye, who found its classic hardwood floors and vaulted ceiling an ideal backdrop for showcasing her décor. “I’ll never forget walking up a snowy path with my new husband and seeing the candlelight through the beautiful French doors. It felt as if we were entering a beautiful home, not some banquet hall or hotel ballroom,” recalled Leslye. “Naturally you remember your wedding day for the rest of your life, but I’ll also remember the entire ambiance of my reception. It was perfect.”

Leslye made note of the Community House during a friend’s 1991

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Exterior view of Highland Park Community House

wedding. “I didn’t want to go the hotel ballroom route or contend with having my décor choices influenced by ugly carpeting or wallpaper,” she explained. “The Community House offered both the blank canvas and the vintage feel I was after.” Leslye expressed appreciation for “a very responsive” staff, particularly Event Coordinator Wendy Horwitch, who assisted in so many ways including providing the O’Neals with vendor brochures. “Those with experience at Community House affairs earned my top consideration as they had a leg up on its facilities, layout, accessibility, and other offerings.”

Just a half block south is **The Art Center** (1957 Sheridan Road, 847-432-1888, [www.theartcenterhp.org](http://www.theartcenterhp.org)). With its framed original artwork, it achieves a truly one-of-a-kind motif. Beyond that, a blank palette invites one’s own inspired designs into the space(s) selected. After a \$1.8 million renovation in 2003, the totally refurbished Center offers rental of the entire main floor (an estimated 5,000 square feet of entertaining space) or any combination of its four rooms: An entry lobby—a perfect pre-dinner mingling or cocktail reception area; the lecture gallery—otherwise known as the fireplace room (though romantic, the fireplace is non-working due to the associated risk to artwork); the main gallery; and behind it, another smaller gallery. Maximum capacity is 220 with a buffet service (which anticipates guests transitioning from room to room.) Sit-down-service affairs accommodate fewer. The Art Center provides tables and chairs and with its gleaming wooden floors, ample space for dancing. Linens and other décor, including flowers, are the bridal couple’s responsibility.

“We host about three weddings a year right now,” said Executive and School Director Gabrielle Rousso, adding that corporate and community groups also hold events at the facility. Unlike some venues, renters are not limited to specified caterers. “We have a small prep kitchen and with our lower level classrooms, convenient and spacious private areas for the wedding party to dress.” With its museum-like lighting, open spaces and artwork, The Art Center offers a uniquely dramatic wedding venue.

## Special Touches for a Most Special Day

“Leslye was a particularly knowledgeable bride and knew exactly what she wanted,” confirmed Rosann Santi, who along with sister and partner Renee Ruedig owns **Floral Gardens** (2109 Green Bay Road, HP, 847-432-3420, [www.floralgardensofhighlandpark.com](http://www.floralgardensofhighlandpark.com)). Formerly Bahr’s Floral, its 80 year history makes the shop a Highland Park fixture that, under current owners, “strives for a personal touch with

artistic flair and exceptional service.” That, plus years doing centerpieces for Community House events, clinched the deal for the O’Neals.

Rosann explained that while brides continue to stick with long standing traditions on their floral arrangements, today’s vast options can be overwhelming. Votive candles surrounding vases in staggered heights to vases with floating candles are popular, as are a myriad of other arrangements. And then of course, there’s an infinite selection of flowers in any size or color imaginable. While seasonal availability varies, anything, said Rosann, is possible, contingent on budget.

“With Leslye, we were able to work up her order over the phone and then she and her fiancé simply came in to approve the sample.” But that, explained Rosann, is the exception not the rule for most brides. “Brides typically have a color scheme in mind,” said Rosann. “Otherwise we brainstorm – honing in on the colors and flowers they like. We encourage them to scan and pull magazine pictures of what they do and don’t like, which helps us learn their personality and what appeals to them.



Highland Park Community House with centerpieces by Floral Gardens, table settings by Froggy’s Catering and Carousel Linens



PHOTOS: James Spada

The O’Neals’ wedding cake by Froggy’s Catering



To complement her color scheme of black, red and gold, Leslye selected Black Magic roses. Each table's centerpiece held a dozen of the flowers in a low square vase wrapped in tea leaves and surrounded by a scattering of votive candles. Her bouquet of 18 Black Magic roses, hand-tied with ivory satin, was adorned by a special photo charm of her grandmother, "to make her part of my wedding because she was too ill to attend." The groom's boutonniere, also a Black Magic rose. Her five bridesmaids carried ivory roses and the groomsmen sported ivory rose boutonnieres.

## Eat, Drink and Be Married

Unencumbered by a "preferred vendors" policy, Leslye incorporated tried-and-true favorites and expert recommendations into her wedding plan. Among these, **Froggy's French Café** (306 Green Bay, Highwood, [www.frenchrestaurantchicagocatering.com](http://www.frenchrestaurantchicagocatering.com)). In addition to the restaurant (847-433-7080), that houses **Froggy's Catering** (847-433-1560) and **Gourmet Frog Bakery** (847-433-7038.) This pride of Highwood and four-time recipient of Zagat's Award of Distinctive Excellence, earned the O'Neals' nod for caterer. A favorite special dinner spot of the couple during their courtship, then-fiancé Jay reserved a table for their celebratory engagement dinner. Learning of Froggy's catering, the couple knew they'd found their wedding caterer. "The food is exceptional, and we love their detailed French service and the consistently high quality of product," said Leslye. "Our goal was to serve a restaurant quality meal rather than the mass prepared food you so often encounter at large catered gatherings." And compared to several "downtown" caterers she'd considered, Leslye found Froggy's the most reasonably priced.

Under the watchful eyes of executive chef Thierry Lefeuvre and co-owner/head of catering Thierry Mace, the O'Neals' and their guests enjoyed a gourmet meal with matching fine dining service. Following extraordinary hors d'oeuvres, a delectable duo of beef tenderloin and braised breast of chicken entrée was served—each embellished with a wine and mushroom sauce and plated with what Leslye described as "cheesy rich potatoes"

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