

Come Hell or High Water, Wedding Happens

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COLUMBUS JUNCTION, IA – After battling an overwhelming Cedar River that damaged most of the town's businesses, one Iowa community found a reason to celebrate hope during the floods of 2008.

Residents of Columbus Junction, Iowa gathered atop the Highway 92 bridge to celebrate the love between two people, one of whom happens to be an Iowa Army National Guard Soldier.

Spc. Curtis White, 28, a machinist with the 3655th Component Repair Company based at Camp Dodge, Johnston, Iowa, and Daniele Ritter, 29, both of Macksburg, Iowa, were feted with the wedding for which they've been waiting nearly two years and, according to many residents, this was definitely one of the most unique weddings the town has ever seen.

The couple's first wedding attempt, scheduled for 2006, was canceled due to White's deployment to the Sioux City Airbase as part of a security force for Operation Noble Eagle. "It just didn't feel right to get married at that point," said Ritter.

The couple tried again two years later, setting a June 18, 2008 date in Winterset.

However, that wedding was also set aside, because White and approximately 4,000 other Soldiers and Airmen of the Iowa National Guard had been called up to state active duty for flood response, recovery, and relief operations.

"Some of the duties we were tasked with included sandbagging, pulling security, building sand levees and supplying the community with clean drinking water," said Curtis. "We were doing anything the community needed help with."

"We've had approximately two units spending their duties here, about 51 Soldiers total," said Verlinda Prior, a member of the Columbus City council, a town closely related to Columbus Junction. It was then that Ritter placed the now-memorable phone call to the Columbus Junction city hall.

"Come Hell or high water, we're



Spc. Curtis White and Daniele Ritter exchange vows on the Viaduct

getting married," she told city officials. The city then did its part to make her dream come true, offering the couple flowers, punch, a wedding cake, and a local singer. "It's good to see hope," said Prior. "We wanted to help this couple who were apart, we wanted to put them together."

"And it's about time," said the former Daniele Ritter, laughing with her new husband. "Everyone in the community is very excited, and has completely backed us up 110 percent."

"I was her stand-in mother, since her real mother couldn't be here for the wedding, at first" said Mary Wilson, wife of Columbus Junction Mayor Dan Wilson. "My husband will stand in as her father."

Rita Multon, the bride's mother, couldn't be more excited for her daughter. "I am so excited, this is all great," said Multon. "Everyone here has been so nice, so supportive. Everyone here has been so wonderful."

Daniele had no idea her mother was going to be at the wedding, so it was a real surprise for her as she

walked down the bridge with Mayor Wilson. As Daniele saw her mother, she gasped loudly and smiled.

"That's what brought on the tears," said Ritter. "I was so happy and surprised to see her." The newlyweds were married by Chaplain (Capt) Murray Phillips, the Iowa Army National Guard's 67th Troop Command chaplain. After such devastation, this wedding was just that special something this small Iowa town of 3,000 needed to lift their spirits.

"It's a hand-in-hand effort, the soldiers help us, we help them," said Prior, herself a huge military supporter. Her son serves in the U.S. Army, has completed one combat tour in Iraq, and he anticipates deploying again in the future.

"We have lost our general store, gas station, bowling alley, and some homes," said Prior. "But the troops have been absolutely great. We ask for help, and we get it. The troops are so quick to respond, and I haven't heard them complain once."

"I hope everyone in the United States realizes they need to back these

guys," said Prior. "They will always be welcome here. I've told them to call me Mom!"

"Verlinda has been great," said Ritter. "She adopted me and my children, and has just been so instrumental." In fact, Ritter stayed with Prior the week up to her wedding. Hundreds showed up at the wedding, all smiling and happy for the light shining on their devastated community.

Among those in attendance were Republican presidential candidate John McCain, who arrived in Iowa to tour the flood damage. The Arizona senator met privately with the entire family, shaking the couple's hands, congratulating them and posing for a few pictures. McCain also presented the couple with a special wedding present.

As the couple embraced and shared their first married kiss atop the Highway 92 bridge, Mary Wilson had the final word. "I even made a sign," she said. She laughed as she held up a piece of paper that read "Columbus Junction: A small town with a big heart."

Briefly -

City lifts boil order

The boil order for Columbus Junction and Columbus City has been lifted. The water treatment system is fully functioning, the water was tested by the University of Iowa Hygienic Laboratory and was approved for all uses. Bottled water will no longer be distributed.

Cairo Reunion cancelled

The Cairo Reunion scheduled for June 29th has been cancelled due to the recent flooding.

Charlie Burroughs benefit

Letts Poker Run Benefit for Letts Fireman Charlie Burroughs (injured in a motorcycle accident 5/18/08) July 5th. Sign up at the Letts Fire Station 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Last one out at 1:00 in by 5:00 PM. There will be 50/50, food, fun and raffles. Want to join the fun of the Poker Run but rather not drive? Join us on the Farmers Bus Leaving Letts at 1:00. Join us afterwards for an evening of fun at the Letts Street Dance! Letts will hold their annual Street Dance Saturday, July 5th at 6:00 PM to Midnight. Come join the fun with the Lynn Allen Band. Must be 21 years old. Sponsored by the Farmers Bar & Grill. For more information call Steve Barnes at 563-299-9856.

City Council to meet

City of Columbus Junction to hold Regular Council Meeting Wednesday, June 25, 2008, 5:30 p.m. at the New Civic Center/City Hall.

Suggestions sought for Alumni Banquet

The Columbus Alumni Committee appreciates your understanding of the postponement of the Alumni Banquet due to the flood emergency. Possible alternatives for this year are: 1) to reschedule in July, 2) to cancel for this year and refund ticket money, or 3) to cancel for this year and present the ticket money to the Presbyterian Women, who had made some preparations. If you want your opinion heard, call Jerry Bell or Jim Howell.

Columbus Fun Days

Join the excitement of Columbus Fun Days at the Columbus Junction Library on Monday, June 30 and Tuesday, July 1 from 12:30 - 2:30 pm. Louisa County Conservation and ISU Extension invite kids and parents affected by the flood to join in this great event. There will be lots of games, crafts, snack and a hike. Monday's theme is "Water Everywhere" and Tuesday's theme is "Nature Around Us". Meet in the Columbus Junction Library parking lot. Kids can come for all or part of the time. No need to register - just show up. Parents can either stay and participate or help with flood clean-up efforts. All ages are welcome, kids under 5 must be with an adult or older sibling. Adults wishing to help are also welcome. Contact Louisa County Conservation at 319-523-8381 with any questions.

Empowerment Board to meet

The Des Moines/Louisa County Caring CommUNITY Empowerment Board will be meeting at the First Presbyterian Church, 801 Middle Street, Mediapolis, IA on Wednesday, July 2 at 10:00 a.m.

Shuttle Service to Wapello available

A shuttle service will be provided to transport people from Columbus Junction to Wapello for shopping and other errands while the affects of the flood make travel and business very challenging. The shuttle will operate on Thursdays making two trips daily. The first will leave the CJ Civic Center at 9:00 am and return around 11:30 am and the second will leave at 1:00 pm and return around 3:30 pm. Riders can direct the driver as to where they need to stop in Wapello, 4 Columbus Junction businesses have locations in Wapello: Jack and Jill, Hy-Vee Pharmacy, Dollar General, and Casey's. The shuttle service is provided courtesy of Our Church of Wayland and is free to users.

Extension and EMA schedules meetings for those affected by flood

Louisa County Extension and the Louisa County Office of Emergency Management will be holding meetings for those displaced by flooding every night at 7 pm at the Solid Rock Baptist Church on Locust Street in Wapello. These informational meetings include updates on road and flood conditions in Louisa County; the latest updates on food, housing and other services; updates on aid and question and answer sessions. The public is welcome to attend. Meetings will continue nightly until the need is met.

Library to celebrate 60th Anniversary

The Columbus Junction Public Library will observe its 60th Anniversary with an Open House Thursday, July 17 from 3-6 P.M. Please join the Staff, Board, and Friends of the Library to celebrate this milestone.

Community Club to meet

The Columbus Community Club will meet this Thursday at noon at the Civic Center. A meal will be served.

5K Flood Relief run, walk set

A 5K flood relief run, walk or jog fundraiser will be held at the Sunset Park in Washington, Iowa on June 29, 2008. Registration begins at 5:00 p.m. with the run beginning at 6:00 p.m. All proceeds will help the surrounding communities that have been affected by the flood. 13 and under - \$5.00, 14 and older - \$20.00, family package of 4 - \$50.00

Presbyterian Church collects relief items

Donations are being accepted at the Christian Education Building of the Presbyterian Church to be taken to Wapello for distribution. Items can be left off on Thursday from 12:00 to 6:00 p.m. Items needed are bath and shower gel, anti-bacterial soap, lotion, baby bottles, pacifiers, garbage bags, laundry soap, cleaning supplies, paper towels, A&D ointment (for diaper rash), baby spoons, dish soap, gloves, kleenex, first aid supplies, nail clippers, pain reliever, dryer sheets, hair brushes, hair accessories and baby toys.

Community sadly says Good-Bye to Pastor Cathy and welcomes Pastor Coffin at Service last Sunday

By Deb Bean
Gazette Staff

June 22, 2008 was Pastor Cathy Whitlatch's last sermon at the Columbus Junction United Methodist Church. She will be leaving the Church and our community for Oregon where she will be working in much of the Western United States for the Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church in support of missionaries and mission projects.

It was my intention to have Pastor Cathy featured in 'Women of Louisa County'. Even though Pastor Cathy is leaving our community, she can take comfort in knowing that she has touched our community in so many ways and is leaving behind not only the church, but the friends and fond memories she has made. Here is Cathy's story of how her journey into doing a job she does so well and has committed her life's work to.

Pastor Cathy grew up in a Roman Catholic family and as a child she learned that church was a place where one could go to seek God's comfort and guidance. "I remember being particularly touched as a child by the 'Stations of the Cross,'" states Pastor Cathy. She fell in love with a Methodist Minister, she sought counseling from her local priest who helped her begin to discern God's calling in her life. Pastor Ron and Pastor Cathy were married in 1977 and she worked as a Schoolteacher.

In March of 1983 Cathy applied to be a missionary working with the United Methodist Church. "Not only did Ron and I feel called to proclaim the Good News, but we also wanted our children (then aged 1/2 and 3 1/2 years) to be exposed to other cultures," says Cathy. By late summer Cathy was living in Argentina. The first four years she worked with women and children, but felt called to the pastoral ministry. It was not until she was moved to a different district (1987) that she was trained

and allowed to work as a lay pastor.

After 4 1/2 years of being a co-pastor with Ron in three rural churches in Argentina, she returned to the USA for seminary. She came with a strong recommendation from Nelly Ritchie, who was her superintendent at that time and presently the bishop of the Argentine Evangelical Methodist Church. After graduation and ordination as a Deacon (probationary Member) in 1995, Pastor Cathy returned to Argentina as a pastor in Mendoza, Argentina. Ron and Cathy returned to the US and came to Iowa in 2001.

Pastor Cathy's time spent in Argentina was very formative. When she arrived in Argentina, she couldn't speak a word of Spanish and she didn't really understand the persecution the people had been enduring. Argentina suffered a brutal repression under a military dictatorship where 30,000 people disappeared. The majority of the people who disappeared were young: 18 - 35 years old. The Methodist Church worked tirelessly speaking out for the dignity of life. This has had a profound effect on her life and her ministry.

"I feel God's Spirit prompting me to discover and to help others discover God's image. Everyone has been created in that image, but we don't always allow that image to shine forth," says Pastor Cathy. She adds, "Columbus has been a great place for me and my family. I will miss the Columbus Community immensely."

I tried ending each "Woman of Louisa County" with a with saying that I felt appropriate. Thanks Pastor Cathy for serving our community in so many ways. "There is always the danger that we may just do the work for the sake of the work. This is where the respect and the love and the devotion come in — that we do it to God, to Christ, and that's why we try to do it as beautifully as possible." Mother Teresa

Taking over the Methodist minis-



Pastor Cathy Whitlatch



Pastor Al Coffin

try is Pastor Al Coffin.

As the Columbus Junction United Methodist Church and our community says good-bye to Pastor Cathy we are saying hello to their new Pastor, Pastor Al Coffin.

Pastor Al was born in Fairfield. "We moved around a lot when I was growing up but by the time I was in high school we were back in Fairfield," he states. He attended 9th grade in Iowa City and that is when he met his future wife, Diane.

They married young at nineteen. Pastor Al put Diane through school and then Diane put him through school. They both graduated from the University of Iowa, in 1982 and 1987. After Graduation Pastor Al went into the military as an Army Corps of Engineers second lieutenant. He served in Desert Storm and worked in several overseas assignments as well as in the US. He left the service in 1999 and returned to Iowa where he worked in Cedar Rapids for about three years. At that time, shortly after the tragedy on 9/11, he had an opportunity to work overseas doing relief work in Afghanistan.

Heworked there for two years and built many houses, and helped to rebuild roads and other infrastructure as part of a Christian relief organization called Shelter for Life.

He returned to the states for about six months and went back into the field after the Tsunami struck in the Indian Ocean. He worked in Sri Lanka for about five months. Then applied to the University of Dubuque from Ampara, Sri Lanka, and returned home in time for fall classes in 2005. He graduated from the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary in May of 2008. The churches in Columbus Junction and Columbus City are his first appointment as a United Methodist Pastor.

"I look forward to getting to know the people of Columbus Junction and Columbus City. I have spent a little time there over the past year as I worked with Ron and Cathy Whitlatch in the Hispanic Ministries at Columbus Junction United Methodist Church. I have enjoyed that time immensely and look forward to getting to know the towns and their people in the coming months."