

## Wedding Pros In Vermont: Mixing Business and Pleasure

**It starts like this.** Seven people whose job it is to create the right environment for one of the most special celebrations of anyone's life—a wedding or civil union—get together to talk. Out of that first meeting in 2004 came the Vermont Association of Wedding Professionals (VAWP), an organization whose goals are simple: to help create a "Vermont Brand" for weddings that takes advantage of the unique beauty of our state and its wedding venues and of the expert knowledge and personal touch of its wedding professionals; to develop a network that generates leads and helps bring more destination weddings to the state; and to help track the financial impact and potential of this business for the state's economy.

"It's a small state," says Tim Piper of The Inn at Round Barn Farm in Waitsfield, part of the wedding hotbed of the Mad River Valley and president of the VAWP, "and the association helps bring the wedding community together. We were seeing brides from New York bringing their own hairdresser up to Vermont for the weekend, and we realized that was

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money out-of-pocket. We knew there were plenty of professionals here who could provide the same level of service, but there needed to be a way to get the word out. Thus the need for a statewide association of professionals who would be able to establish that Vermont could bring an entire package of services to the bride."

People who come to Vermont to hold their wedding or celebrate a civil union often have a personal tie to the state inspired by many different sources. Whether they've skied here, gone to school here, have family here, or come for fall foliage, there's an individual emotional connection that's hard to quantify. But what the wedding business brings to the state of Vermont is pretty impressive, and very quantifiable. Three years ago in *Vermont Magazine's* own *Weddings* insert we noted that Vermont ranked among the top three national wedding destinations. The VAWP estimates that in the span of one year some 435,000 wedding guests come to Vermont, and when you figure that they stay for a couple of nights each—it adds up.

"All of a sudden people sit up and say: We're part of a two-hundred-and-fifty-two million dollar industry!" Piper says. And that's a conservative figure according to the VAWP; nationwide, the amount spent on weddings annually has been estimated at over \$100 billion.

And though the state of Vermont has not officially measured the impact of destination weddings on Vermont's economy, the Vermont Association of Wedding Professionals hopes, by its outreach, member surveys, and professional attention, to get the word out—and to bring more business home to Vermont. With more than 50 founding members already, ranging from bakers to innkeepers, florists to event planners, the Vermont Association of Wedding Professionals plans to keep the celebration going!

For more information and a list of members, contact the Vermont Association of Wedding Professionals at 1661 East Warren Road, Waitsfield, VT 05673, (802) 864-1075, [info@vawp.com](mailto:info@vawp.com).

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