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## Vendors to throw \$815,000 wedding for filmmakers

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BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY JOHN CLARKE RUSS

Film makers Aron Gaudet, left and his bride-to-be, Gita Pullapilly, and Bangor Troop Greeter Gerry Mundy pose for a picture before the couple's wedding rehearsal dinner Thursday evening at The Retreat at French's Point in Stockton Springs. **Buy Photo**



Aron Gaudet and Gita Pullapilly have been on an extraordinary journey together since their documentary film about three Bangor International Airport troop greeters debuted in March.

Yet for all that time, director Gaudet and producer Pullapilly, who have been engaged since July 2008, had a very ordinary dilemma on their hands.

How were they going to find the time to plan their wedding while traveling around the country accepting awards for and promoting their film, "The Way We Get By"? With most of their savings sunk into the movie, how were they going to pay for their wedding?

Seven months later, director Gaudet and producer Pullapilly have found their wedding dilemma resolved in a most unexpected way. A new company, formed by two Bangor area women very much involved in the planning of weddings, has taken care of everything.

Gaudet and Pullapilly will be married Friday afternoon at The Retreat at French's Point in Stockton Springs. The entire three-day affair has been organized and donated by more than 25 vendors from Maine and New Hampshire. The approximate value of services is more than \$815,000, according to the vendors.

Gaudet and Pullapilly are getting the wedding of their dreams — although they don't exactly know what that looks like yet, because almost all of the details have been kept secret from them and their 120 guests.

The organizers, French's Point owner and CEO Jessika Brooks, and wedding planner Amber Small, and the vendors contributing services also are getting something out of the event.

Small and Brooks recently formed Real Weddings Maine, a company that seeks to highlight the Pine Tree State as a wedding destination as popular as Cape Cod, Mass., or the Florida Keys. They're hoping any local and national attention paid to the filmmakers' wedding will help do that.

"We knew we wanted to do something like this, but the missing link was a couple," Small said of the time she and Brooks were thinking about throwing a function for Real Weddings Maine. "I saw the

movie at the Collins Center [in Orono] ... and it was so incredibly touching that I was thinking about it even two or three days later. There was an epiphany [that] it would be a win-win, a way for us to get them more press for their movie, and they had press behind them and connections to promote Real Weddings Maine.”

The \$815,000 in estimated services might seem high for a Maine wedding, but Small said the vendors are looking to show off their top-of-the-line services.

“Everybody has a range of services,” she said. “If I’m going to do this for national press, I’m going to do the highest price I can.”

Gaudet, a 35-year-old Old Town native, and Pullapilly, 32, met in 2004 when they were both working in the television business in Michigan. They started out as friends, then began dating and got engaged last year. For most of that time, they filmed the lives of three troop greeters, including Gaudet’s mother, Joan Gaudet.

“The Way We Get By” was first screened in Maine in 2008, when a rough cut was shown at the Camden International Film Festival. A few months later, in March 2009, Gaudet and Pullapilly debuted the finished film at the South By Southwest Film Festival in Austin, Texas, where it won the Special Jury Award.

Since then, “The Way We Get By” has been a film festival hit, has had openings in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles, and is scheduled for a Nov. 9 national showing on the PBS program “P.O.V.”

When Gaudet and Pullapilly heard from Brooks and Small about the planners’ proposal for Real Weddings Maine, the filmmakers were surprised, and a little relieved.

“It’s pretty amazing,” Gaudet said recently. “It’s something we never expected and we’re still shocked it’s happening. It made planning our wedding the least stressful thing we have going on.”

After a meeting with the bride and groom to learn their likes and dislikes, and interests and backgrounds, Small and Brooks began looking for vendors for all the standard elements of a wedding, from flowers to a wedding cake to photographers. They wanted to combine Gaudet’s Maine background and Pullapilly’s Indian heritage.

One of the vendors Small and Brooks contacted was the L Factor, a salon in Brewer, which is sending six stylists to do hair and makeup for Pullapilly and some of the wedding party.

L Factor co-owner Jodi Leighton hadn’t seen “The Way We Get By” before agreeing to participate in the wedding, but was impressed by Small’s own emotional response to the film. At the same time, the L Factor was eager to promote its business and believed in Real Weddings Maine’s premise of the Pine Tree State as a destination for weddings.

“They have donated so much of their time and every ounce of their money into this production,” Leighton said. “Everyone wants to help and provide the most fabulous wedding possible. I’m very anxious to see the movie.”

L Factor also designed a custom headpiece, a 1940s-style veil with crystals and feathers, for Pullapilly.

The headpiece will be a surprise for Pullapilly, who along with Gaudet has no idea what the color scheme will be, or the wedding theme or any other elements.

“We sat down with them and said, anything you come up with will be better than we imagined,” Gaudet said. “We want you to do it, to surprise us. ... We’re letting them do everything.”

Small did allow Pullapilly one concession.

“We did let Gita pick out her dress,” Small said. “[To not] would just be cruel and unusual punishment.”

The weekend will wrap up with a brunch Saturday morning, after which time Small said she and Brooks will start to look for another worthy couple for whom they can throw a wedding and show off Maine at the same time.

“We would like to make it a yearly event,” Small said. “Aron and Gita are a really awesome way to kick it off.”

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