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Tying the Knot to Running a Business

May 5, 2011

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Stargrazer lilies, dendrobium orchids, duck-leg confit canapés, smoked salmon blini, cobalt, cerulean, cornflower or just plain blue – decisions, decisions, decisions. Many of us would be in a tailspin trying to choose the prettiest exotic flowers, the perfect color scheme or most delectable menu for an occasion. As the owner of a wedding planning business, alumna Joan (Teitelman) Cinquegrani '06 diligently and excitedly plays the role of the decision maker. She is the calming and decisive voice for the stressed-out, busy or simply confused bride and groom.



*Joan (Teitelman) Cinquegrani '06
Photo by Melissa Marie Photography*

Cinquegrani is the owner of Five Grain Events, a firm helping brides and grooms with the wedding planning process. Five Grain Events – derived from her married name Cinquegrani, which means five (cinque) grains (grani) in Italian – has taken on more than 30 couples as clients this year alone. In addition to managing an online wedding blog and two assistant consultants, Cinquegrani personally meets with each couple.

A vocal performance graduate of Illinois Wesleyan University, Cinquegrani never anticipated being a business owner. “I had no idea that I even wanted my own business,” she said, “honestly, I never thought of myself as an entrepreneurial person.” A former development department associate at Lyric Opera of Chicago, Cinquegrani has been involved with event planning for a number of years. Even while attending IWU, she was attracted to event planning, coordinating Jazz Night, a fundraiser for the music fraternity Delta Omicron. “It was the fraternity’s first major fundraiser and my first start-to-finish event, from conception to execution,” said Cinquegrani while reminiscing about the performances in the Presser Hall courtyard, which included a silent auction.



*Cinquegrani supervising from the side as alumna Brittany (Moore) Strubbe '07 walks down the aisle.
Photo by Steve Matteo Photography*

Cinquegrani’s love affair with weddings, however, began quite some time before she enrolled at IWU. “I have always loved weddings. At the age of three, the first song I wanted my dad to play on his guitar was Here Comes the Bride,” said Cinquegrani, whose father rewrote the lyrics to the Beatles’ Here Comes the Sun for her nuptials to IWU alumnus Pat Cinquegrani '06.

Combining her passion for event planning and weddings into a formal business was not something Cinquegrani had initially intended. “I just wanted to plan weddings for fun, not because I wanted to leave my full-time job,” she said. While still working at Lyric Opera of Chicago, Cinquegrani spent her leisure time assisting a Chicago-area wedding coordinator, whom she connected with through the Knot.com, a popular online guide to wedding planning. During this time she was able to learn the coordinator’s planning style, experience different venues and most importantly – network. “Networking is essential in the wedding planning business,” she said, “and although client referrals are great, most couples hopefully only need my services once, so vendor referrals are golden.”

With a solid network of vendors behind her and potential clients calling on her services, Cinquegrani began to book weddings on her own in the spring of 2009. While meeting with clients is an essential part of Cinquegrani’s role as a wedding consultant, she finds that most of her time is spent visiting different venues and meeting with numerous wedding professionals, such as photographers and wedding cake designers. “Time management and organization are key,” she said, “I rarely have an unscheduled moment, but the final product – a beautiful event – is always worth it.”

Cinquegrani soon realized she needed to make a choice between weddings and her job at Lyric Opera of Chicago. “I enjoyed what I did at Lyric, but I realized I would not be able to grow my business if I did not do it full-time,” she said. “How would I know if it could become a career if I did not jump in head first?” Less than four years after graduating from IWU, she was ready to take a chance. In May 2010, she left Lyric and faced the reality of owning a business.

Cinquegrani credits her business courses at Illinois Wesleyan – a requirement of her arts management minor – for giving her the confidence and background to make her business functional. She recognizes that her hard work and passion for the wedding industry allows for her successes.

“Owning a business has been so much more work than I could have ever imagined, but every bit of hard work I put in, I get back. It has been so rewarding,” said Cinquegrani. Adding that her favorite part of being a wedding consultant is “knowing that I have helped make a couple’s wedding day as perfect as it could possibly be.”

In addition to growing her business, the soprano continues to stay true to her musical roots. A founding member of Wicker Park Choral Singers, she appeared with the group on [The Oprah Winfrey Show](#) earlier this year. Also, she recently visited New York City to perform with the Chicago Symphony Chorus. The group won a Grammy for best choral performance in 2010.

This past year has been an exhilarating one for Cinquegrani, “if you had told me one year ago that I would be a successful business owner, booking 30 weddings in a single year, I would not have believed you.”



*Cinquegrani helping a groom with his boutonniere.
Photo by Shane Welch Photography*

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