

Wedding plans

Birdseed throwers hope to start new tradition

SOUTHURY, Conn. (AP) — This idea is really for the birds.

Lisa Mae and Robert Keller have introduced a new product to the bridal market: nuptial birdseed, guaranteed to keep church sidewalks clean and feathered friends alive.

The product is simple: a plastic champagne glass filled with bird seed and decorated with lace, a satin ribbon and a paper heart describing the new tradition.

The idea is for guests to throw the birdseed instead of rice. The product pleases church ministers, who say rice is dangerous to post-wedding pedestrians because it can become slippery when wet. It also pleases environmentalists, who call rice a lethal food for hungry birds who come along after the wedding.

Mae's mother, state Rep. Mae S. Schmidle, R-Newtown, introduced a bill last year to ban the throwing of uncooked rice at weddings. She contends that rice — especially instant rice and rice that is scented and colored especially for weddings — kills birds.

The idea received national attention, with many experts saying rice posed no threat to birds. The bill died in the General Assembly after some representatives vetoed the idea of fining rice throwers.

But the idea didn't die in Mae's and Keller's minds. With visions of profits and humanitarianism floating through their heads, they took a chance during the summer and turned Mae's basement into a makeshift assembly line for the burgeoning Kel-Lee Enterprises Ltd.

The idea of filling champagne glasses with bird seed — and mar-

keting them as "Feather & Lace" — "happened one night while Rob and I were drinking a little too much champagne while trying to think of ways the idea could be promoted," Mae said with a grin.

When they aren't filling glasses with bird seed, Keller is a shift supervisor for a local aluminum foundry and Mae is a research physicist for Exxon Inc.

Mae already has a patent on an ink jet product she developed for Exxon. She and Keller have a patent pending on the latest product. If "Feather & Lace" and other ideas the two have developed for bridal parties become financially rewarding, both say they will give up their jobs to work full time for the business.

"We've always been fascinated with the prospect of owning our own business," Mae said.

Added Keller, "It's the American dream."

Each case of "Feather & Lace" contains 25 glasses and costs about \$25 plus shipping and handling. If demand becomes too much for Mae's basement to handle, local hand-capped residents may be hired to assemble the product, Mae said.

So far, about 200 cases have been sold, mostly to local brides, Mae said. Advertising has been limited mostly to local newspapers and samples placed in tuxedo and bridal shops.

"The response has been very good so far," Mae said. "We ourselves have grown — we're now marketing mints in champagne glasses and white helium balloons for weddings where the minister won't even allow bird seed."

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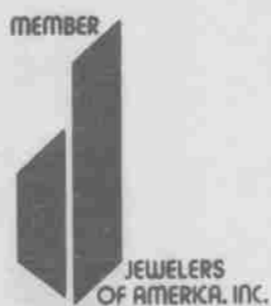
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