

You're invited to the new wedding of the century

BRING YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR AND AN OPEN MIND. THIS EVENT MAY FOREVER CHANGE YOUR PERCEPTION OF WHAT CONSTITUTES A DREAM WEDDING.

BY KIKI BOCHI

The Wedding of the Century has always been the term used to describe the marriage of Britain's Prince Charles and Princess Diana. But that is so, well, so *last* century.

The *new* Wedding of the Century, or so it is being called, takes place this month in Broward County between Duchess (a sort-of royal) and Digory. Don't expect designer gowns or crown jewels, however. There may be horse-drawn carriages, but the newlyweds won't be sitting in them, waving to the crowds.

Duchess and Digory are miniature donkeys at Tomorrow's Rainbow, a unique therapeutic children's bereavement center in Coconut Creek that uses animal contact along with compassion to help youngsters deal with the loss of a loved one.

The wedding is being staged as a fundraiser for the center, which opened in 2005 and runs entirely on private and corporate donations. Since the farm is not usually open to the general public, the event also offers a chance for residents to learn about the program and experience the magic of miniature horses, ponies, pigs, and donkeys – while supporting an important mission.

"This is going to be some event," says center director Abby Mosher. "It will be like a real wedding."

Well, sort of, except that the flower girl is a golden retriever, the ringbearer is a pig, and the bridesmaids and groomsmen are miniature horses. We don't even want to think about what the bachelor party might involve.

A local jeweler is creating special adornments for the animals, a florist is donating the flowers, Coconut Creek Vice Mayor



Becky Tooley is scheduled to officiate, and there will be separate cakes for the separate species. (The newlyweds' will be made from oats, bran, peanut butter, applesauce and molasses; the human version will be made of the usual stuff.) The reception will include a live band, square dancing, crafts, and an animal petting area and obstacle course.

Abby Mosher keeps sense of humor when discussing the upcoming nuptials, although the event has a serious purpose.

Her center was established following a tragedy one beautiful day six years ago on a Texas highway. In a split second, what started out to be a vacation for her young family came to a crashing end. A head-on collision took the life of her husband, Paul, and left Abby and their little boy, Dustin, hospitalized. Mother and son returned to Broward County on Dustin's eighth birthday, and buried Paul the next day.

Because they had good medical insurance, the Moshers were fortunate to have mental health counseling available to them. But Abby was saddened to learn



so many other children do not have the same benefit, and no charitable programs existed for children's bereavement counseling in Broward County.

"Death is an uncomfortable subject, so bereavement is not something people want to hear about," says Abby, 44. "Our community has just not taken the steps to address the needs of bereaved children."

Weeks after the accident, Abby ran into an acquaintance that was using miniature horses to bring smiles to sick children, and her mind began to churn. She had loved horses since her girlhood, but, like most little girls, never managed to convince her mom to get her that pony. Here was her chance. She could share the magic of miniature horses with bereaved kids and fill a very important need in the

community, all in Paul's memory.

"We started out very low key," says Abby, who has undergone extensive training to create a program that would have a positive impact on the lives of grieving children. "We didn't want to make any mistakes. It's just too important."

The program is open to any child who has suffered a loss, whether a parent, sibling, friend, or grandparent. About 100 children have been served so far. Three support groups currently exist, and there is a waiting list of teens who want their

own group. Kids are allowed to attend so long as they feel a need to.

While the program does not offer traditional therapy, it provides facilitated peer discussions, art activities, interaction with the animals and therapeutic games to help the children deal with their loss.

"Most children don't need therapy, they need support. They need a place where they can feel safe expressing their grief," Abby Mosher says.

"We find that when children come to us, they feel so isolated because they don't really know other children who are experiencing what they are experiencing."

The program is critical because adults tend to underestimate the impact grief can have on the development of a child, she says. Unresolved grief can be a burden those children carry their whole life, however.

Mosher says the children in her program and their parents tell her frequently that Tomorrow's Rainbow is the only place they feel comfortable sharing their feelings. In fact, she wishes her son Dustin, now 14, would have had a similar program to help him deal with his father's death. "He didn't have any other children that he could relate to," she says. "Adults can't understand the challenges of a child facing grief unless they faced grief themselves as a child."

Mosher feels a real sense of mission in keeping Tomorrow's Rainbow growing. And that means not only concerning herself with the children who attend the program, but also caring for the farm and animals who live there. She says she has received a tremendous response for local community sponsors, and a lot of support for the wedding of Duchess and Digory.

Asked what she might do next year to raise funds, Abby Mosher replies, "I don't know what I could do to top this."

She doesn't have time to think about that right now. She has a wedding to plan.

Want to go?

WHAT: Wedding of the Century (2007 version)

WHO: Digory and Duchess, two therapeutic donkeys

WHERE: Tomorrow's Rainbow, 4341 NW 39th Ave., Coconut Creek

WHEN: May 20, 2pm

WHY: Fundraiser for bereavement program that assists children who have lost a loved one

TICKETS: \$25 for adults and \$10 for children under 12; available by calling 954-978-2390.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: To learn about the program, see www.tomorrowsrainbow.org. For Digory's kid-friendly "diary" and photos, see www.dollarsfordigory.com