

# Courthouse weddings gaining popularity

Charlotte County first to offer virtual weddings during pandemic

By **NANCY J. SEMON**  
STAFF WRITER

“Going to the chapel and we’re gonna get married,” are the opening lyrics to a popular 1960s song, “Chapel of Love,” but in a pandemic, more couples are opting for simpler weddings, according to various reports and the Charlotte County Clerk’s office.

The Clerk’s Office was already a popular wedding venue after it underwent an extreme makeover in 2018 by Crystal Henderson, director of official records (and non-official decorator extraordinaire).

Deciding the room reserved for weddings needed revamping, Clerk Roger Eaton had Henderson unleash her decorating skills. The result is a beautiful, welcoming setting.

One couple — Curt Boykin and Heather Buckley — said the Clerk’s venue perfectly fit their needs. They came from North Carolina to get married Friday. When asked why they chose the setting, Heather said, “We’re older, and especially with COVID ...”

The couple chose to have no guests; they mentioned having grown children and seemed to prefer an intimate setting. They also are fans of Punta Gorda.

“We like it here and we want to move here,” Curt said.

Eaton officiated at the ceremony, which was brief, but moving nonetheless.

“Heather Buckley, do you take this man to be your lawful wedded husband, to live together in Holy Estate of Matrimony, to love, honor, comfort him and



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**Curt Boykin, Heather (Buckley) Boykin and Clerk Roger Eaton after the marriage ceremony officiated by Eaton.**

keep him in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, for as long as you both shall live?”

The same wording was used for Curt: “...do you take this woman to be your lawful wedded wife...”

Eaton might have improvised a bit, but Cathy Ingegnere, assistant to Eaton, said the couple chose ceremony “B,” which is the simpler of the three ceremonies, and its wording appears above.

The couple also opted not to have the exchange of rings part of the ceremony.

When Eaton said, “now you may kiss...” their embrace and kiss lasted longer than the ceremony.

What has changed the way ceremonies are held since the lobby reopened,



**Curt Boykin and Heather Buckley are about to tie the knot at the Charlotte County Clerk’s office. Clerk Roger Eaton officiated at the ceremony.**

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is that everyone must wear a mask. The couples are allowed to have a maximum of six guests, and all must be masked.

Unlike traditional vows in the past, when Eaton said “you may kiss” he also added that they could remove their masks for the iconic ending to a wedding ceremony.

Despite COVID-19 and having to wear masks, it was moving to see a couple who were apparently so much in love. Their union was what mattered, not the setting or frills of an elaborate wedding and reception.

The clerk’s wedding area, now that it is open, allows young couples looking for a home and beginning their career, to save a lot of money toward their future goals.

Older couples who are economically established, perhaps don’t want to go through the stress of having a big wedding and all the details it entails.

A marriage ceremony at the Clerk’s office, which can be



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**Crystal Henderson, director of official records, transformed three rooms at the clerk’s office into inviting areas for weddings and the passport office. Pictured is the lobby, or waiting area outside the two rooms.**

conducted by Eaton, Henderson or one of her staff members, costs \$30. A Florida marriage license is \$86, and there is a three-day waiting period. If the couple takes a pre-marital course, the cost for a license drops to \$61, said Ingegnere.

Except for mask-wearing and

limiting wedding guests to six, things have just about returned to normal, but with safety measures built in. Returning to near-normalcy was due to the effort of Eaton and his staff.

“The lobby was closed on March 30,” said Ingegnere. But after staffers put on their

thinking caps, so to speak, they began to hold virtual weddings via Zoom, which began on April 14 last year.

“We are proud of the fact that we were the first Clerk’s Office in the state of Florida to conduct legal marriage ceremonies online during COVID,” said Eaton.

“While nothing can match the happiness of a live wedding, with a newly wedded couple surrounded by all of their family and friends, we were happy to provide a temporary solution for couples during COVID,” Eaton added.

During that time of virtual weddings, the clerk’s office handled 85 virtual applications and 38 virtual weddings; perhaps the ones who didn’t go ahead with plans were waiting for the clerk’s wedding room to reopen, which it did on June 1.

“Since we reopened, there have been 277 ceremonies,” said Ingegnere.

On Friday, when Buckley and Boykin were wed, six other couples were also getting married.

For more details, go to [charlotteclerk.com](http://charlotteclerk.com) and click on “Marriage Services.”