



MELISSA LOUISE

Donald Shepherd and Jenny Ducharme hold their son, Jeremy, after the couple's wedding ceremony yesterday at the Cape Codder Resort in Hyannis. Justice of the peace Judith Todd-McNichol of Brewster arranged free wedding services for the couple.

CAPE WEDDING 'LIKE A FAIRY TALE'

Justice of the peace, businesses help military couple

By K.C. MYERS

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HYANNIS – Yesterday was justice of the peace Judith Todd-McNichol's second Christmas without her husband of 18 years.

Howard "Buck" Cass died after falling off a ladder at his home last November at age 59.

Still, Todd-McNichol found joy this season officiating and organizing a wedding for a military couple.

Todd-McNichol not only offered her services for free – her standing policy for any military couple – but she also ran around collecting freebies from wedding-related businesses to make the couple's Christmas Eve wedding affordable as well as memorable.

"It was like a fairy tale," said the bride, Jenny Ducharme, who lives in Norwood with her husband, Donald Shepherd, and their 5-month-old baby, Jeremy.

In a last-minute show of affection, Ducharme and her fiancé, a former marine and current member of the Army National Guard, decided to marry as a Christmas present to each other.

Ducharme wanted to marry on Cape Cod. Just two weeks ago, the bride-to-be began searching the Internet and found Todd-McNichol.

When Todd-McNichol, who lives in Brewster, informed the couple the services would be free, "I got emotional," the 33-year-old bride said last night.

But that was just the start.

"Justice Judy" spent a few days making calls and secured a suite for the newlyweds at

the Cape Codder Resort. Staff members at the resort offered to do the bride's hair and her bouquet for free. The Golden Fountain Restaurant owner gave them a \$20 gift certificate for dinner. And photographer Melissa Louise granted a huge discount, Ducharme said.

The couple had planned to throw on some boots and get married on a cold beach. Instead, they exchanged vows before a roaring fire and a huge Christmas tree at the Cape Codder Resort.

"We just wanted to show our love for each other," said the groom. "But then all these calls started coming in. It's been overwhelming."

The couple have a lot of thank you notes to write. The first definitely goes to Todd-McNichol.

"This woman is a godsend. And all the people know her, and they respect her, so when she asks for something, people do it," Ducharme said.

Todd-McNichol deflected any compliments. She said it's easy to get local business people to help the men and women fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"People thank me for asking them," she said.

"They want to do something. It feels good."

Since the wars began, Todd-McNichol figures she has done about 12 free weddings for military couples. The Brewster woman said she does the free services because she feels a special bond with military fam-

ilies. Her mother was a nurse and her father a medic when they met in Shanghai during World War II. And her late husband, a minister and contractor, served two tours of duty in Vietnam as a paratrooper.

Besides the military connections, Todd-McNichol also senses "our human oneness. I feel that all the time," she said.

Ducharme and Shepherd certainly appreciated the help after a tough year. Ducharme's pregnancy involved several complications. Doctors warned them their child may not survive until birth. After birth, little Jeremy required two blood transfusions. Now he's fine. The couple also realizes Shepherd could be called for duty in Afghanistan at any time.

So to celebrate their love and togetherness with a wedding on Christmas Eve felt truly amazing, Ducharme said. They invited Todd-McNichol to join them for dinner at the Golden Fountain Restaurant.

They didn't know Todd-McNichol had lost her husband just a year ago.

The dinner invitation was especially welcome, Todd-McNichol said.

During the wedding service, Todd-McNichol called the event "A Miracle on Iyannough Road."

"The certainty of love from total strangers is a true miracle," she said.



JUDITH
TODD-McNICHOL