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Life

## Make a splash

### Smooth sailing for party planning

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By Gina Joseph, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

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Your mother-in-law may not pose a problem, but Mother Nature can be a real tyrant when it comes to outdoor weddings.

"It never rains on the Ovation," said Steven Rybicki of St. Clair Shores and vice president and general manager of the Infinity and Ovation Yacht Charters, which caters weddings and proms, among other events. By that he means, if Mother Nature does happen to muster up some raindrops and thunder clouds, guests can retreat to the warmth of a cabin.

"We have been told by many people that our wedding reception was by far the best they have ever attended!" said Kathy Brady, speaking on behalf of her and her husband, Todd. Of their Friday night wedding reception aboard Infinity, Brady added, "It was a dream come true and tons of fun. I wouldn't change a thing about the entire event!"

Wedding packages (based on 75 guests) range anywhere from \$9,320 to \$17,187 (additional guests add \$67.50 per person).

Couples can marry on shore or they can call on Captain Mel Reicher to perform the services on the water. Born and raised on the eastside of Detroit, Captain Mel always has had a passion for the water. As a youngster, he and his family spent their summers at a cottage across the lake in Belle River, Ontario. After attending the Maritime Professional Training sea school in Florida, and serving his apprenticeship navigating tour boats back and forth across the Great Lakes, he landed the job as captain of Infinity, and has been at the helm ever since.

"I am so grateful that I'm able to work in an industry that keeps me on the water," said Captain Mel, who also skips the Ovation.

Owned by the Sterling Heights-based Continental Dining Services, Infinity is similar to the Ovation, only smaller. For more than 20 years it served as the only yacht in the charter service. In 2005, the much bigger yacht Ovation was added to the charter business, enabling the company to accommodate a larger, more traditional wedding.

"We can accommodate anywhere from 150 to 300 guests," said Rybicki, who became a member of the crew when he was a teenager. "I started out on the Infinity when I was 15, working as a dishwasher. It was my first summer job. I worked my way up to crew member, first mate and general manager."

All this before he turned 25.

Ten years later, he's managing a fleet of employees who love what they do.

"I feel like I own it," said Alan Day, who plays saxophone for the Kimmie Horne Show Band, which rocks the boat in a cool way. Day said charter yachts such as the Infinity and Ovation are good for the river as they give people a chance to see Detroit's beautiful skyline from the water. "We need a few more of these," he added.

Also a member of the Infinity and Ovation's happy crew is Eric Norat.

"It's a great gig," said Norat, who, on this night, was in charge of the never-ending pasta buffet. The cruise also featured an open bar and a nice variety of food, including grilled shrimp and sausage kabobs, cheese and cracker trays, fruits and veggies. Getting much of the attention were the mushroom raviolis, which he was sure to credit to his uncle and master chef, Chuck Sansone.

How fabulous is the food on Ovation? So good even the teenagers at Richmond High School, who chartered the yacht for their senior prom, made a point of saying so.

"The food was great, and when the kids tell you that, you know it was good," said Debbie Michon, Richmond's assistant principal and one of the chaperones for the event.

"I would definitely recommend it to other schools," said Michon. "It was more than what we normally ask the kids to pay for a prom, but over the summer they held a fundraiser."

As a result, instead of costing \$75 per person, it was \$55. This included an open juice and soda bar, hors d'oeuvres fit for a teen — Bavarian pretzels with spicy honey mustard, chips and salsa, homemade barbecue potato chips and Vidalia onion cream — plus a marvelous dinner prepared by Chef Sansone, DJ, and a 4-hour cruise on a luxury yacht.

High school events have rules such as no underage drinking, no entering off-limit areas. In this case, they also had to abide by the rules governing the ship and crew such as no kicking off those fancy heels mom paid a fortune for as soon as you enter the dance floor. Shoes on at all times. They were also told in advance that there would be no stopping anywhere and no getting off.

"They were stuck with us all night," Michon said.

Yet, that was the best part.

They were all on the yacht together, and because of the luxurious atmosphere, music, food, beautiful scenery and other perks that go along with a cruise, it was a great experience for everyone concerned. "It was so neat," Michon said. "The kids just loved it. They took pictures. They danced. Usually we go to prom and 9 or 10 o'clock we're like, 'Isn't it over yet?' "

Such was not the case aboard Ovation.

There was so much to see and do, and because of the smaller, more contained area — and the fact that the crew also was watching out for the students' welfare — there wasn't as much policing. "So, you could actually visit with the kids," Michon said.

"It was probably the best prom we've ever had," said Michon's fellow chaperone and Richmond High School science teacher Brian Roodbeen. "Everything about it was fabulous."

"The kids are already asking if we are doing it again next year," Michon said. "I haven't heard yet, but I hope they do. It was a

nice night."

Headquarters for the Infinity and Ovation Yacht Charters is at 400 Maple Park Blvd., Suite 404, St. Clair Shores. For information on the wedding and prom night packages, call (586) 778-7030 or visit the website, [www.infinityandovation.com](http://www.infinityandovation.com).

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