

Tahoe wedding officiant has seen it all



Warren Kessler has been a wedding officiant for decades. Photo/ABHOW

By ABHOW

To have and to hold, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish from this day forward, until death do us part.

Warren Kessler, who moved to Tahoe Senior Plaza in South Lake Tahoe in September, has presided over the exchange of this vow more than 13,000 times.

Kessler began conducting weddings in 1983 after he moved to the area with his wife. He was ordained through the Universal Life Church and soon began freelancing as a wedding officiant. Also a state notary, Kessler went on to work for several chapels before settling in at Chapel of the Bells, where he performs ceremonies as an on-call minister. That means he has to be ready to go at a moment's notice.

"I could be at a restaurant. I could be anywhere," he says.

When he gets the call, he runs down to the chapel, does the wedding and goes back to where he left off.

The chapel is a no-nonsense kind of place, where couples often skip the typical frills like tuxes and gowns. "Two people just get out of their car. 'I do, I do.' That's about it," Kessler says.

With 31 years of experience under his belt, it's not surprising that Kessler's mental archives are bursting with fascinating tales. He has pretty much seen it all. Couples come in from all over the country and the world. "They all have interesting stories to tell you," he says.

The average wedding goes smoothly, Kessler says, but every now and then strange things happen. He recalls a nearly 40-year-old groom named Joe, who was affectionately called "Junior" by his mother. In an effort to declare his independence, he insisted that Kessler call him "Little Joe" during the ceremony. Not only were guests confused, the mother was furious. "It looked like the blood drained out of her head and into her ankles," Kessler says.

Other notable weddings include one with a groom getting married for the 10th time and another where the groomsmen rented tuxes but forgot the shoes, leaving them standing at the altar in sneakers.

There's no doubt that Kessler enjoys his work. In fact, he doesn't think of it as work at all – and it certainly isn't the typical 9-to-5 job.

"Weddings are always fun," says Kessler. "It's a happy business."

Founded in 1949, ABHOW is widely known for its pioneering leadership in senior housing and health care. The company serves more than 5,500 residents in 44 retirement communities in California, Arizona, Nevada and Washington.