



Alice Cabral's shop in Toronto. All the bridal dresses are previously owned. They range from \$300 to \$2,000.

Photos by Giovanni Capriotti

A DAY TO REMEMBER

By Giovanni Capriotti

Marriage is synonymous with family and happiness in the majority of the cultures. It is the final goal even for the most resilient and career-driven men and women. The dream of the perfect day, to celebrate the union with their loved one, is common to both genders and involves families and friends.

According to GroomNBride, a platform of wedding planners, the industry - considered a true "recession-proof" one - generates in Canada roughly \$4.5 billion each year in Canada. Ontario contributes 46 per cent of this total. Canada averages 156,000 weddings a year and each one can be vastly different, given the multiculturalism on which the country is built.

In the past, the typical engaged woman was 21, lived at home and had her wedding mostly planned by her mother. But now, the bride-to-be is mostly older and has more money to spend, making this an attractive demographic for advertisers.

Trenton-born Alice Cabral has been in the bridal business for over a decade. She started from her house in Quinte West and recently moved her activity to Toronto.

"No matter what, people will always get married. They'll spend less money if times are not good, but still buy into the day to remember," she said, adjusting a bride dress.

The engaged couple stage is among the most compelling sales opportunities for business/companies. Over an 18-month period, the engaged couple considers various ways to spend over \$4.5 billion on their wedding, ceremony, honeymoon and other purchases for marriage.

"I used to be able to know how many licences were issued in the area. After each ceremony, I was contacting the bride to buy her dress. That is the way I started, selling pre-owned dresses," Cabral confessed candidly.

According to a 2011 Canada census, the city of Belleville, with a population of 49,454, has a female demographic of 5,960 individuals in the age group between 20 and 39. In the same age range, the male demographic stands at 5,740 people. Simi-

lar sized communities nearby appear to have same numbers. This makes the whole area a potentially serious contributor to the \$4.5 billion estimated by GroomNBride.

"We need to keep in mind that although the wedding industry is huge in terms of revenue, it is often difficult to track exactly where that money is being spent. This is because the industry is made up of multiple smaller enterprises like caterers, wedding consultants, dresses, jewelry, various beauty suppliers, photographers, honeymoon related, etc. In addition, many of these smaller enterprises also do other events and don't necessarily break their business down into wedding versus non-wedding," observed Jessica Dexter, a Toronto event director.

"A complete wedding in a King street west venue starts roughly at \$265 per person," she continued.

From the cutting edge Toronto skyline to the pristine beauty of Sandbanks Provincial Park, it seems that the amount of money around a wedding celebration varies according to the disposable income of the families or their lines of credit.

"Within certain communities, you don't want to look cheap when you have to organize your wedding. This is why I don't use the term "second-hand dress". It wouldn't market my items properly. Pre-owned works well and doesn't make you feel cheap," Cabral said with a smile.

Wedding styles can be very personal, but most have underlying commonalities. There is definitely a North American way to celebrate such an event. But as it happened for food, ethnic traditions persist, however shaped by a touch of "Canadiana".

"Once I organized a Halloween style wedding. All the guests showed up in costumes and the bride wore a vintage red burlesque dress," Dexter funnily recounted.

The bride dress encompasses the idea and the magic of the wedding and can be one hell of an expensive item.

"I try to sell my dresses at no more than \$2,000. The cheapest one can easily go for \$300, but still we are talking about pre-owned ones," Cabral said.

The economy may certainly be shrinking but the idea of a memorable day celebrating the love between two people still holds and does not seem to be endangered by worldwide modernism or new trends.



(Above) Alice Cabral adjusts a bridal dress in her Toronto shop. The dress is approximately \$700 and is previously owned.

(Right) A bridal dress sits on a mannequin in Alice Cabral's shop in Toronto.



(Left) A \$950 pre-owned bridal dress is accented with a black and floral design.