

## **“Majestic match: Irishman, Jersey native play complementary parts in marriage, business”**

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PHOTO BY MIKE MAPLE

Deni and Patrick Reilly, owners of The Majestic Grille, still enjoy cooking together at home. They cook breakfast on Sundays, their day off, as well as test recipes for special events at the restaurant.

The blues brought together Deni and Patrick Reilly, owners of The Majestic Grille in Downtown.

Deni, 36, who is originally from New Jersey, moved to Memphis in 1997 and planned to stay for two or three years. Patrick, 46, who is from just outside Dublin, Ireland, and has been in Memphis nearly 10 years, jokes he came here just for the weekend.

They met when Deni was working for the Blues Foundation and Patrick was running the Gibson Guitar Lounge. They worked on several projects together and interacted a lot because of work.

They dated on and off for awhile, and not surprisingly, most of their dates were music related. "We saw Robert Cray at the Botanic Garden, Rufus Thomas at the Music and Heritage Festival, and we had third-row seats at Aerosmith," Patrick recalls.

"We were both pretty much consumed with music," Deni adds.

After two years of dating, they broke up. (Patrick admits he was a little gun-shy from a divorce.) However, the festive atmosphere at the annual St. Patrick's Day party at Dan McGuinness Pub made Deni miss her Irishman.

She says he happened to show up at the bar that night, but he says she called him after a few pints of beer. Either way, that meeting was all it took for them to get back together and soon get engaged.

"The local Irish community was really pulling for us," says Patrick. (Deni is half-Irish and half-Italian.) He adds that Jo Delahunty, who bartended at Dan McGuinness, told them the night of the St. Patrick's Day party that she'd been praying for the two of them to St. Jude (the patron saint of lost causes).

They decided to have an intimate family-only wedding where everyone would have ample time to get to know one another. This translated into a 110-person wedding in a 14-room medieval castle in Ireland in

September 2005. Deni's family stayed in the castle for a week, and Patrick's family rented cabins and condos in the surrounding area.

The festivities kicked off with a Wednesday night pub crawl. "There were only two pubs in the village," says Patrick. "We never made it to the second one."

On Thursday, they had an interfamily golf tournament -- in the rain -- that Patrick's aunt won. Thursday evening, the handful of Memphis friends who made the trek borrowed a smoker from someone in the village and barbecued beef and ribs. "Nick Vergos sent his family spices," says Deni. "Local musicians came over and we had a throwdown until 5 a.m.," adds Patrick.

The wedding took place Friday at the castle. They had champagne on the lawn, a dinner catered by the area gastropub, Patrick's brother-in-law's blues band played, and everyone danced.

When the formal reception was over, the locals came up for what is referred to as "The Afters." (Patrick recommends serving sandwiches at midnight at any event to keep it going.)

On Saturday, everyone had breakfast together and then headed back to their respective homes. Deni and Patrick joke that their wedding is still talked about in hushed tones. But their plan worked, and as a result of the marathon of festivities, the two families are incredibly close today. "Patrick's family from Ireland comes to stay with my family every other year," says Deni.

Six months after the wedding, in May 2006, the Reillys opened The Majestic Grille at 145 S. Main. After a year or so of figuring things out, they decided to tap into the building's rich history and build on its former incarnation as a movie theater. They added a movie screen and focused on becoming a community gathering spot. "We always wanted to be a neighborhood spot, but nicer than a burger joint," Deni says.

When asked about their roles at the restaurant, Patrick jokes, "I'm the owner's husband." In reality, he's the chef, working on refining the restaurant, coming up with new menu items and specials and spearheading the capital improvements.

Deni is in charge of marketing and works on building relationships with the local arts community. It was Deni's idea to start the successful Thursday night block parties.

The Reillys are happy to have a dedicated staff that runs the restaurant for them. "We spend a lot of time there, but it runs without us," says Patrick. They take Sundays off together, and each has one day a week off without the other.

On Sundays, they like to cook a late breakfast and eat it in the living room while reading the newspaper. "Patrick will cook Spanish omelets or the occasional traditional Irish fry, or we may do something as simple as smoked salmon and bagels," says Deni. They also grill out a lot on Sunday nights in the summer. In the winter, they make huge quantities of Deni's grandfather's spaghetti sauce with meatballs and sausage to freeze.

They also spend time testing recipes at home for special events at the restaurant.

On her days off, Deni likes to garden, go walking with a friend and sometimes meet the girls for a drink. When he's off, Patrick says he'll either golf with the boys or take a long lunch that includes a glass of wine and a cigar.

The two say they enjoy traveling and don't really feel like they're "off" unless they go out of town. "We have trouble letting go," jokes Patrick.

About once a month, they take a trip -- usually some place like Oxford, Miss., Washington, D.C., Florida (where Patrick used to live), New York or Deni's parents' lake house in Virginia. One of their favorite vacation activities is visiting other restaurants. The two most recently went to Ireland to celebrate their fifth wedding anniversary.

They have a modest lifestyle, so traveling is what they like to spend money on. Getting away is what keeps them coming back.