



Bride Melissa Anderson and groom Nate McCallum are first in line to sample the sumptuous buffet prepared by Beggars Banquet.

Photo by Phil Audibert

Wedding stories

Anybody who has been in the catering business has plenty of stories about weddings. Marty and Currey are no exception. Asked about the worst event they ever catered, they don't hesitate a nanosecond to say, "the hot wedding in Northern Virginia."

The thermometer hovered at 105 degrees! They were stuck in a dirty basement with no water and had to ferry a "full-blown southern buffet, with things like corn pudding and fried catfish, pies with ice cream" up a steep embankment. Emily Van Santvoord, who was carrying heavy pitchers of water, has only one word for that day... "horrible." She almost collapsed of heat exhaustion "I can't do it anymore" she remembers bleating to her mother.

Weddings are stressful. They take on a personality all their own, and Beggars often finds itself in the position of being de facto wedding planners and hand holders. Weddings also bring out the best and worst in people, like the mother of the bride from hell. Even the bride herself warned them about her own mother. "From the very beginning to the very end, we were at fault," recalls Currey tightlipped. And to top it off they almost ran out of food. "That is a horrible feeling," says Marty somberly.

And what about the commitment ceremony in Sperryville where everybody brought their dogs. Beggars Banquet had placed café tables around the yard. "There's this Boxer; he goes over by the café table and lifts his leg and pees on this beautiful gold linen, and then every other dog had to do the same thing." At one point the dogs got into a fight, and to make matters worse, the well ran dry.

But there are also fun ones, like the two gay lawyers from San Francisco who wanted to have a commitment ceremony in the Charlottesville area. When Marty and Currey met with them for a consultation, they hit it off immediately. "We knew exactly what they wanted. We came up with a great menu, and they were stunned. It was like a party. It was one of the most fun times we've ever had. It was a very happy wedding."

track of, "every item on this menu, what do we need to bring, which platter is it going on, what serving utensil, what bowl, and then I pack 'em." Marty sighs. "It's a lot of counting." Currey meanwhile is deftly stuffing 110 puff pastries with brie and brandied cherries, as classic rock and roll blares from the stereo. The phone is ringing off the hook.

There are so many details that when they travel to a job, Emily will hang back at Church Street and field cell phone calls from Marty and Currey. "We forgot the toothpicks, we need another chafer." Like a baseball player batting clean up, Emily arrives a half hour later with all the missing items.

The "to do" list mushrooms to three bulletin boards the week before the Montpelier Races, the busiest weekend of the year for Beggars. When it's all said and done, they will have served 600 people, from the owners, riders and trainers in the huge centrally located tent, to the Montpelier President's tent, to corporate tents along the rail. One year, they made the mistake of catering the Paddock Party the night before. Marty and Currey got one hour's sleep that night!

All of this work, all of this preparation, this attention to detail, costs money. The food for Melissa and Nate's wedding cost about \$27 per person. But add in all the other details...tents, tables, chairs, silverware, plates, bartenders, staff, it comes out close to \$80 per person... "and a year's worth of our lives," smiles Currey.

It did not include a tip. "Most caterers add the gratuity on as a separate line item," snorts Marty. "It irritates us." She adjusts her black-rimmed glasses and reads straight from the contract. "It's our philosophy that gratuity is optional based on the quality of our service. For that reason we do not include it on our bids and leave it to the discretion of our customers."

On the Beggars Banquet website, a motto apes the lyrics of the Rolling Stones song of the same name: "Pleased to feed you... Hope you catch our name!" That's bound to bring a smile. So will the line at the bottom of the page outlining their mission statement: "We look forward to your business... and your friendship."



Beggars Banquet chef, Currey Hay demonstrates when a Pate A Choux puff recipe is ready to come off the heat at the local caterer's kitchen on East Church Street in Orange.

Photo by Phil Audibert



Martha Patterson (left), Currey Hay (center) and Emily Van Santvoord (right) hurriedly assemble plated salads in a back room at Mayhurst.

Photo by Phil Audibert



Currey Hay (left) met Marty Van Santvoord at Currey's wedding. Soon after, Marty hired Currey to be the dinner chef at the Firehouse Café. After that restaurant closed in 2000, the two teamed up to form the local catering company, Beggars Banquet.

Photo by Phil Audibert

of BRIDES and BANQUETS

Just as they were serving 110 plated salads, it started raining. Bridesmaids shivered and gratefully accepted offers by groomsmen to drape tuxedo jackets over their bare shoulders. A wind came up, making the ambient 48 degrees feel like it was in the 30s. The DJ hunkered down and played "Luchenbach, Texas" by Waylon and Willie. It's going to be a long,

miserable night.

But its plenty warm in the bustling cellar kitchen at Mayhurst Inn as Currey Hay and Marty Van Santvoord, of local catering company, Beggars Banquet shift into high gear. "It's raining??? Omigod," trills Currey nonchalantly, as she goes back to slicing beef tenderloin. The kitchen around her is a whirlwind of activity as rain-speckled

servers dart in and out with trays of plated salads.

"Spinach with oranges, bacon, feta and balsamic vinaigrette," reads the menu. Oops, cancel the spinach...the E. Coli scare....make that baby romaine instead...just another change in a business that seems to thrive on change. They've been dealing with changes all week. As

This catering business...it's a big deal. Like an iceberg, you only see an eighth of what's really going on behind the scenes.

Currey rapidly slices beef tenderloin, she explains that they dealt with this weather change yesterday by ordering an extra connecting tent, sides for the existing tents and heaters. All required an "okay" from the bride. "Add on whatever you want, I'll be in Maui tomorrow," Currey quotes the bride, Melissa as saying.

And then how about the place cards? These good folks had put family nicknames on the seating diagram. How in the world is Marty supposed to guess who these people are and where they're supposed to sit. But somehow she figures it out.

The roasted beef tenderloins, rubbed with mustard and herbs, wrapped in bacon, served sliced with Granny Smith apple-horseradish sauce is ready. Time to pay attention to the roasted chicken breasts with apple, mushroom and cider cream sauce, and the roasted new potatoes with garlic and rosemary, and the parsleyed basmati rice and the long-cooked green beans with country ham and onions and the lemon glazed carrots...

"That's a pretty moderate menu," shrugs Marty. Moderate? Yes, moderate. Go to Beggars' website and check out their sample menus! Or wrangle yourself an invitation to Arthur Bryant's Virginia National Bank party in the Barbourville Ruins or Carolyn Sedwick's Christmas bash where Beggars Banquet is given free creative rein. Now that's anything but moderate!

"We like being on the edge. That's the best part," says Currey of this strange rush that everyone who has ever been involved in F & B (food and beverage) understands.

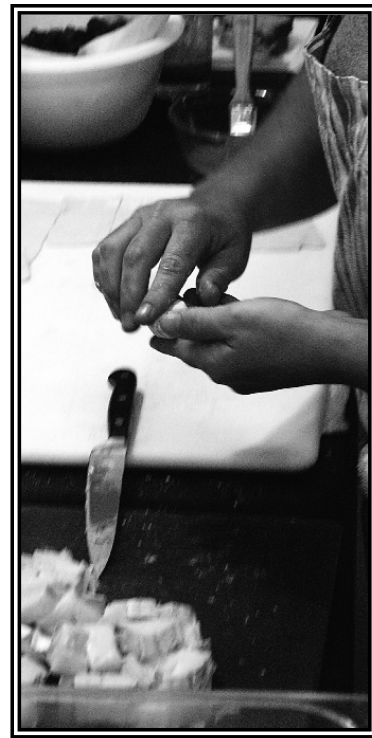
"Just before the buffet goes out when you're finishing your garnish and are the platters ready? and is everybody there?, put 'em all in order and it goes out andahhhh." Currey's shoulders slump in

relaxation. Another satisfied customer, another disaster averted.

And then...a low somber drum roll here..."we clean up...like forever," shudders Currey. In fact even before the buffet has just landed on the table the Beggars Banquet crew is cleaning up.

And so the night will go. Wedding guests will eat and drink their fill. The bride and groom, Melissa and Nate, will cut the cake; there will be toasts and dancing, and the whole thing will just happen, mostly because Marty and Currey and the Beggars crew were ready for it. They even have a four-page "Plan" that shows down to the minute and down to the napkin ring when and where everything happens. They even remembered to accommodate the lone vegetarian at this wedding.

"The best part is when we all come back at the end of the night," says Marty dreamily at the Beggars Banquet combination kitchen, office, rental warehouse and headquarters on East Church Street. "A lot of our jobs are under a tent where there's no water, so we have to come back and wash platters. Currey and I can't imagine picking up another plate but it's because we've been here since 6:00 in the morning. The staff comes in and they're fresh,



Currey Hay hand makes 110 puff pastries stuffed with Brie cheese and brandied cherries for a wedding reception at Mayhurst.

Photo by Susie Audibert

so they're ready to come back and work a couple more hours. They'll wash and put stuff away." She points to the prep table in the middle of the room. "And then we'll all sit here and we talk and laugh and share stories."

They're exhausted. "Physically, it's a lot," continues Marty. "You need that hot tub the next morning." Currey echoes, "feet feeling like blocks of wood. You go to stand up and Noooo." Marty just smiles and says "But I dunno, we're still havin' fun." Currey nods vigorously in agreement.

This catering business...it's a big deal. Like an iceberg, you only see an eighth of what's really going on behind the scenes. For example, the first contact Beggars Banquet had from Melissa and Nate was an e-mail stemming from a visit to their website back last year. In fact, Marty says 80 percent of their customers come by way of the website (www.beggarsbanquet.net).

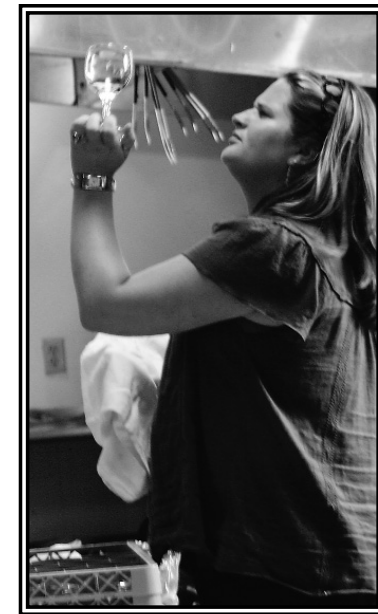
A veritable blizzard of e-mails about everything from menus to silverware, follows that initial contact. Marty hauls out a file nearly an inch thick and thumps it down on the prep table. It represents every bit of back-and-forth correspondence for this event.

Once a menu is decided, Beggars will actually invite the couple and their parents to dinner. "We make a lot of what's on their menu and it's a full-sized portion, and they come in and eat. They have dinner," confirms Currey. "It's really kind of fun because we get to know the people. They actually become friends. You've been

through a year's correspondence; you get to know them pretty well."

Currey catches her breath. "I think they're just making sure that we really come through with what we say we can come through with. We set the table, we make the food, we lay it out for them. We've got the floor plan; we go over it. We're real detailed. Do you like this? Do you like that? How do you like this sauce? Do you want your food done more or do you want your greens cooked less? Do you want this vinaigrette or that one? And by that time if they don't want me, I don't want them," jokes Currey. Needless to say, once they have reached this point, no one has ever turned them down.

There are some exceptions, "We've done several weddings where we have not met the bride until we got there the day of the wedding, which is really kind of weird," winces Marty. "Every job is different and that's what makes it fun for us is that it's always a new situation. We're often working seven days a week. We're probably working more hours than I want to work, and Currey too, but if you're going to do it, you've gotta do it when it's there, so then in January if you don't have business, we've got some money set aside to get us through." Through all of this, Currey has been able to raise three children.



Emily Van Santvoord carefully inspects a rental glass for water spots after it comes out of the commercial dishwasher. Emily, whose Mom is co-owner of Beggars Banquet, coordinates the rental side of the catering business.

Photo by Susie Audibert

August and January are the slowest months in the catering business. But Beggars stays busy year-round due to their new rental business. Although they don't provide tents, tables and chairs, they do supply everything else: glassware, dishes, chafers, table cloths, napkins, silverware, serving platters, salt and pepper shakers, you name it. Marty's daughter, Emily is pretty much in charge of the rentals. She and Currey's sister Jean Link are busy running piles of dishes and glassware through the commercial dishwasher that can clean and sanitize a load in a minute and 15 seconds.

Unlike some home-kitchen, backyard caterers, Beggars Banquet is rigorously inspected by the Health Department. The hood on their four foot-wide commercial stove cost \$1,000 a linear foot. But the biggest challenge is having enough refrigeration. "We could use a whole other room of refrigeration," says Marty as she enviously eyes the space at the front of the building that is rented to another tenant.

A typical week starts on Monday when they order the food from various wholesalers for the upcoming weekend events. They also buy produce from the Garden Patch and the Farmer's Market, and organic meats from Retreat Farm, and Gryffon's Aerie.

Hanging on the back door is a bulletin board...the "to do" list for every day of the week, right up to the event day itself. "The real cooking is Thursday, Friday, and Saturday," says Marty, adding that she must keep

The birth of Beggar's Banquet

Currey Hay and Marty Van Santvoord met for the first time at Currey's own wedding consultation. Currey had hired Marty and Dornin Formwalt, partners in the Firehouse Café, to cater her wedding. "I was the only bride who came in with recipes," she says proudly.

Marty and Dornin, who were relatively new to the catering business, looked at each other in amazement. Never had they had a bride tell them exactly what to cook and how. At the time, Currey was working for Channel 29 in Charlottesville helping out with programming and promotions. But prior to her TV career, she'd garnered a wealth of experience in restaurants, from pushing mops to designing menus.

Marty's experience started when she and a friend and their husbands ran a burrito wagon out of a refurbished postal truck in Maine. When her first son, Toby was born, she put him down for naps in a laundry basket on the dashboard, while she slung burritos out the back. "We'd go to fairs and sell Mexican food in rural Maine." She shakes her head and rolls her eyes skyward.

Shortly thereafter, Buzz and Marty Van Santvoord came to Orange. "We were living in Maine with a baby and saying yikes, 'we're really sick of cutting wood and black flies.'" Marty's sister, Peggy Rice said, "Why don't

you move down here and we said 'Okay.'" And so the Plow and Hearth was born.

And herein lies the beginnings of a complicated family dynasty that would be the envy of a Mafia Don. Marty's sister, Peggy, is married to Peter Van Santvoord Rice, Buzz's distant cousin, and they built the Plow and Hearth which hired Currey's sister, Jean and Currey's fiancé, Dave, who worked his way from stock boy to V.P., while Currey and Marty formed Beggars Banquet, with help from Currey's stepfather, Mike (pause and catch your breath here) and where Currey's sister, Jean and Marty's daughter Emily handle the rental business while, Marty's cousin, Martha works as a staffer during events, and Marty's son, Toby designed and maintains the web site. Whew! Talk about all in the family!

Anyway, on the very day of the 1990 Orange Street Festival, Marty and Dornin Formwalt opened the Firehouse Café. Not long after Currey's wedding to Dave Hay, Marty and Dornin hired her to be their Saturday night chef. "She kind of made us more sophisticated; she had some good dinner menus," says Marty. That was 1995. "She had more restaurant experience than I did; I'd never waitressed before I started."

Ten years later, to the very day, at the 2000 Orange



Marty Van Santvoord takes a rare breather during a wedding reception at Mayhurst recently.

Photo by Phil Audibert

Street Festival, the Firehouse Café closed its doors for good. "I was really burned out," explains Marty. But a funny thing happened. Friends and former Firehouse Café customers kept calling Marty and Currey separately asking them if they could cater this or prepare that. "So we were calling each other, how do you price it out, how do you make it, and we realized it would just work better if the two of us just did it together," reasons Currey.

In the beginning they worked out of Marty's kitchen, "and then we found this place," Marty points around their East Church Street facility with its full-size commercial stove, convection oven, commercial dishwasher,

er, several coolers, numerous floor-to-ceiling metal storage racks and two vans out back. Already, they're busting out of their seams.

One distinct advantage of a catering company over a restaurant is, "We customize every menu for every job; we know what we're making, how many people we're making it for," explains Marty. "We know that what we make is sold and we're not thinking about what we're going to do with that stuff if nobody comes to dinner."

The other advantage is they have assembled an experienced part-time staff. "We have a really good group right now. We have a lot of home-school moms, and it's great because they are adults; they GET it," continues Marty. "That's the one thing about the restaurant business that just burned us out was having employees that didn't really care." Currey looks at the current staff and chimes in, "They're good and they take it seriously."

Marty looks across the Beggars Banquet prep table at Currey whom she fondly regards as her adopted daughter and says, "Currey's very much a natural food person; she just feels it. I have no professional training, but I'm amazed at her talent." Currey does a bashful "aw shucks" move and confirms, "We work well together."



Traci Fowler flashes an infectious grin as she heads out into the wedding reception with a tray of hors d'oeuvres.

Photo by Phil Audibert



Food preparation for the next weekend's event starts as early as Thursday at the Beggars Banquet kitchen, office and rental warehouse on East Church Street.

Photo by Susie Audibert