

THE BEACON

SERVING ACTON & BOXBOROUGH • VOL. 56, No. 45 • THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2006 • WWW.TOWNONLINE.COM/ACTON • 75¢

BUSINESS

Celebrating life's transitions

Resident focuses on unique ceremonies

By **Chrissie Long**
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BOXBOROUGH — Cindy Matchett has been training for her career all her life, but she only discovered what profession that was a few years ago.

As an art school student, she was scrambling to prepare for her wedding. She spent days on the Internet, hoping to uncover ways to make the nuptial day special and personal. Reluctant to go with the traditional American wedding, Matchett wanted the event to better reflect her and her fiancé.

"I wanted my wedding to be more than a simple 'I do,'" said Matchett, who eventually tied aspects of her story and life into the day. She had attended a Quaker School and — in the Quaker way — she decided to conduct the ceremony in a circle, beginning with a moment of silence.

While she was scouring the Web researching options for her own wedding, she came across a site for celebrants. After clicking through the links, she learned that celebrants help people recognize and honor transitions in their lives in meaningful and personal ways.

"It seemed like an exciting opportunity," Matchett said in an interview at her home on Hill Road. "In a way, I feel like I have always been a celebrant."

Religious institutions have always



Staff photo by Chrissie Long

Cindy Matchett of Boxborough is a certified celebrant specializing in non-traditional ceremonies.



Courtesy photo

Cindy Matchett, middle, presides over Sara and Russell Williston's wedding in October.

marked life's milestones. But, in an age where people are no longer tied to churches or synagogues that mark births, coming of age, weddings and deaths, celebrants can honor the landmarks in people's lives with secular services.

"Religious institutions meet the needs of a great number of people," Matchett said. "For those people who are more spiritual and less religious — which is a growing population — there is no way to mark events in one's life. Celebrants can be a wonderful choice for interfaith and multicultural couples and families. I have served people of all beliefs and philosophies."

As an art student, she designed pieces that reflected the importance of transitions. And working for a Web design company, she learned how to personalize products to clients' needs.

Almost obsessed with planning these transition-based events herself, Matchett immediately enrolled in the online celebrant school. Celebrant USA, a nonprofit based on an Australian company, has certified 200 celebrants and interfaith ministers through Internet coursework.

Two years after graduating, Matchett has conducted nearly 30 wedding services a year in addition to housewarming ceremonies, a vasesorty commitment, baby blessings and a divorce ceremony.

"Transitions can often be a vul-

nerable and confusing time," said Matchett, who became the first celebrant in New England. "It is important to bring meaning to those transitions and the ceremonies that celebrate them. In today's fast-paced world, the only way that one can live a truly full life and progress to the next phase is by taking the time to recognize and [honor] special moments in time. But many are struggling with how to do this."

Combining personalities, ethnicities and religions, Matchett creates a service that has meaning to the couple.

She has read from the Koran and the Bible during one wedding. She's combined Asian tea ceremonies with western weddings. She's also collaborated Asian and German traditions in a food-tasting service.

In addition, Matchett has personalized weddings to couples' preferences. She has used dogs as ring-bearers and brothers as flower girls. She has married people in a canoe and in a labyrinth.

"While it can be easy to get caught up in the wants of family members, friends or social customs when planning events, the only way to have a meaningful celebration is by showcasing the individuals' beliefs, values and traditions," said Matchett. "The role of a celebrant is to mirror back to people who they are and what they have been through to get to this mile-

stone in their lives."

Although she does do alternative weddings, Matchett has also overseen many traditional weddings.

Sara and Russell Williston, who live on Codman Hill Road in Boxborough, asked Matchett to officiate their wedding. Not being tied to a church and reluctant to hire a Justice of Peace, the Willistons worked with Matchett to design their service.

"We thought she was the greatest balance between a JP and a Christian minister," said Sara, who had grown up in a Catholic church, but drifted away from it later in life. "We couldn't have been more pleased with how our ceremony came out. We were able to work with her to tailor the ceremony. She personalized most of the commentary in a way that was more specific to us."

As a celebrant, Matchett meets with clients on a regular basis and works with them to develop scripts and orders of events.

"Couples often want something special and they don't know how to do it," Matchett said. "It is often times overwhelming to try to do things on your own. It is nice to have a professional be there with you. We have been trained to understand the psychology of a ceremony and we use a structure that works."

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