



Vol. 9 No. 31 - April 22, 2009

Writers experience Island wedding scene



Kevin Baker and his wife, Lynn Walker, toast a sunset on the beach during a photography session with Island Photography owner Dara Caudill. They were on the Island to research two articles Walker will write.
PHOTO/DARA CAUDILL ISLAND PHOTOGRAPHY.ORG

By Tom Vaught | sun staff writer

If you're going to write about something, you should experience it first.

That's what Lynn Walker did with her husband, Kevin Baker, when she researched her article on Anna Maria Island recently to do articles for Southern Bride magazine and Romantic Destinations Travel.

Working in conjunction with the Bradenton Area Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Anna Maria Island Chamber of Commerce, they stayed in the beachfront Seaside Inn Beach Resort in Bradenton Beach and experienced what a couple having a wedding would, minus the ceremony.

They ate at the Waterfront, The Sun House, Harrington House Bed and Breakfast, the Sandbar, Ginny's & Jane E's, Beach Bistro, the Gulf Drive Café and Mattison's Riverside. They took a kayak tour of Palma Sola Bay courtesy of Shawn Duytschaver, got a massage from Amy Welch of Acqua Aveda Salon Spa Store, sampled wedding cakes and pastries at Matt and Dom's Pastry Café, visited the Anna Maria Island Art League, got a sunset beach portrait from Dara Caudill, of Island Photography, and visited Baobab Tree Gallery and Studio in the Village of the Arts in Bradenton.

Walker, who now lives in Mississippi, is no stranger to the area as she spent a summer living near the beach in Bradenton Beach a few years ago before she got into journalism.

"When I lived there, I was a college girl," she said. "The last thing on my mind was marriage."

She said the Island is still the place to be.

"It has grown, but it still has that wonderful Florida feel," she said. "It's kind of homey and the people are so gracious."

Walker said that the Island is a great place for destination weddings.

"Destination weddings are becoming big because it allows family and close friends of the couple to stay after the ceremony and possibly enjoy a few days on vacation," she said. "Those people will branch out and include fun events on their own, so it really feeds a lot of different businesses."

Walker said her article for Southern Bride, which boasts a circulation of more than 100,000, would be aimed at readers in Alabama, west Tennessee, Mississippi and Arkansas planning destination weddings.

"What people from there normally do is plan destination weddings in the Florida Panhandle or northern Florida," she said. "They don't realize that there are places like Anna Maria Island that aren't much more expensive."

Seaside Beach Resort owner David Teitelbaum, a member of the Manatee County Tourist Development Council, agrees with Walker.

"The secret is out, we're a great destination and more affordable than similar settings," he said. "We have thousands of weddings on Anna Maria Island every year and a lot of those people are visiting for the first time. Pretty soon, you see them showing up again for a vacation."

Walker said her second article, on RomanticDestinations Travel.com, will center on more than people wanting to plan a wedding.

"It's more for couples who are married and want to get away for a romantic time," she said. "They might have kids so they would be looking for some place where their children would have something to do as well."

Walker expects the Southern Bride article to come out toward the end of June, while it should be September or December before the Internet article is published.

Caudill, who is a member of the Chamber Wedding Merchants, said that she expects the articles will reaffirm what we all know - Anna Maria Island is a great place to be.