

City strike leads couple away from the altar

Park photo, ceremony permits cancelled

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When Marlene Dougherty saw the Rosetta McClain Gardens, she knew instantly it was where she wanted to marry.

“She loved it as soon as she saw it,” Trevor Dougherty said of his new bride.

It was to be an outdoor wedding, with the ceremony performed in front of a cascading waterfall, surrounded by flowers at the Scarborough park.

But when the City of Toronto's unionized employees went on strike June 22, the couple's event and photo permits were instantly cancelled, five days before the big date.

“We started freaking out,” Mr. Dougherty said. “My wife was absolutely devastated. She cried for two days straight.”

The couple had less than a week to find a new location, reschedule the limo, the minister, and the musicians, and contact nearly 200 guests.

“It was a disaster,” Ms. Dougherty recalled. The two wound up marrying at a golf course in Stouffville, Ont., which was beautiful, Mr. Dougherty said, but “just wasn't what we wanted.”

The rescheduling also cost the couple about \$3,000.

For two weeks, wedding facilities at the Scarborough, East York and York civic centres have been closed because of the strike. Permits to hold ceremonies and take photographs at city parks have also been cancelled, with no new permits being issued.

According to a City of Toronto spokesperson, the permits were cancelled because of maintenance and liability concerns.

While the city is not looking to punish people who choose to take photos without permits, “they're certainly doing it at their own risk and not with the endorsement of the city,” the spokesperson said.

Another city official said two wedding ceremonies that were to take place at York Civic Centre have been cancelled and one was postponed, and three at Scarborough Civic Centre have been cancelled, three postponed, and 13 moved to North York.

Ceremonies are still being held during business hours at Toronto City Hall and the North York Civic Centre, but no new bookings are being accepted anywhere but City Hall.

While the city had no information on how many photo permits have been cancelled, photographers across Toronto say that hundreds of couples have had to scramble for new locations.

“We were basically left stranded,” said Maria Sanchez, whose photo permit was cancelled 21/2 weeks before her wedding.

Ms. Sanchez and her fiancé, Gary Williams, have found a new location in Ajax, but they are still upset.

“Now we can't do it in the park that we both have fond memories in,” Ms. Sanchez said.

Leni Bliangas and Brad Grassi, who will become husband and wife Saturday, have also had to move their photos.

The two had always assumed they'd have their pictures taken among the roses, wildflowers and secluded pathways of Edwards Gardens. Both Ms. Bliangas and Mr. Grassi's parents had their wedding photos taken at the park and they wanted to continue the tradition.

When they found out their permit was cancelled because of the strike, they, like others, considered going to Edwards Gardens without one. But their photographer warned that the grounds would be unkempt and that police officers, who are not on strike, might ticket them for trying.

“We paid big bucks for a photographer,” Ms. Bliangas said. “We didn't want to run that risk.”

The couple has chosen to have their photos taken at a park in Unionville, which will require travelling an extra hour with an 18-person wedding party, four flower girls and a ring boy on their big day.

“Weddings are a big-ticket, huge expense, and to have something like this when you have so many other things to worry about is a real headache,” Ms. Bliangas said.