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The wedding party cheers at the Livingston Depot during the 2018 wedding celebration of Ashleigh and Ray Carlson.

Getting married at the Depot

By **Justin Post**

Yellowstone Newspapers

When it came time to tie the knot, Ashleigh and Ray Carlson had multiple reasons for choosing the Livingston Depot Center as the ideal venue to exchange vows among family and friends from across Montana and beyond.

The fact that Ashleigh, the daughter of Paul and Gerri Lyman, grew up in Livingston was among the reasons why the Depot rose to the top of their list.

Ray also has ties to the area, where his great grandmother, Julia Phillips, worked at the

Depot baking pies for railroad workers passing through the city during its days of railroad glory. In fact, Julia Phillips met – and later married – a railroad engineer named Williams while working at the Depot.

The icing on the wedding cake, if you will, is the fact that Ray and Ashleigh actually met at the Depot during Ashleigh's sister's wedding there on Sept. 19, 2015.

Their family connections to the building aside, the Carlsons are like dozens of couples who choose the historic and iconic Livingston Depot every year for

their wedding reception or ceremony, or both.

"It's always been the focal point of town," said Ashleigh, who works as a physical therapist in Helena where she and Ray, who works in information technology, make their home.

At the same time, the non-profit Depot was an option that didn't smart the pocketbook, she said.

"It was really affordable compared to most places we looked at," Ashleigh said. "The affordability was great."

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Depot, from Page 3

When it comes to planning a wedding, having a contact who is willing and eager to work with the bride-to-be is key. And Ashleigh said those qualities are exactly what she found in Depot Executive Director Laura McCarthy Cota.

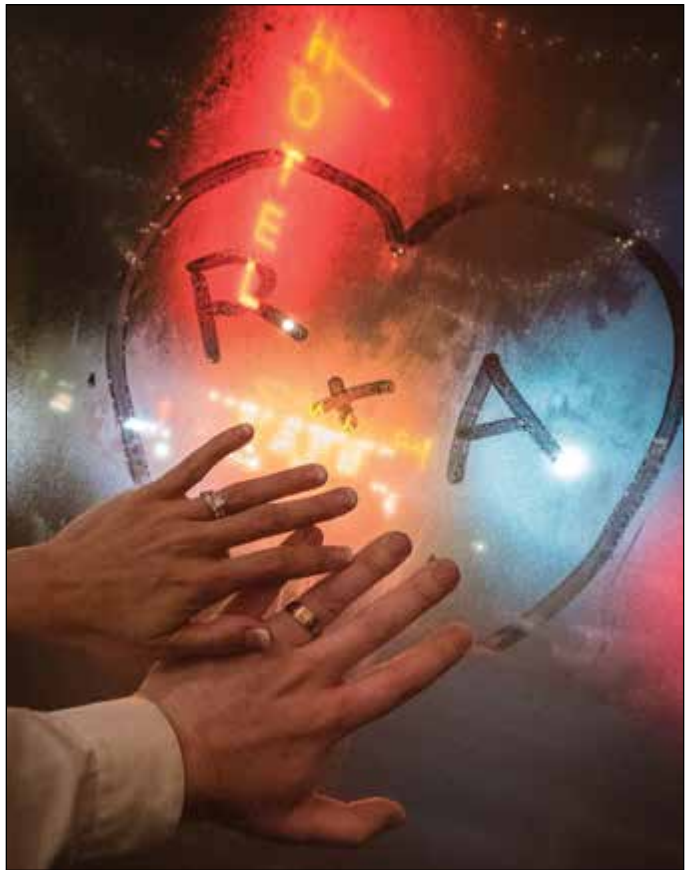
“She was awesome to work with,” Ashleigh said of McCarthy Cota.

Ashleigh said the Depot staff was flexible and accommodating when it came to access to the building and preparations for the big day on Sept. 29, 2018.

The fact that the historic Murray Hotel is located just across the street from the Depot was an added bonus. The couple rented the Murray’s expansive Peckinpah Suite, where the groomsmen prepared for the wedding and a majority of the wedding party stayed that night, Ashleigh said.

The Depot also fit the couple’s need for a venue that could accommodate a couple hundred people. Ray, the son of Nikki and Joe DeWolf of Helena, and Ashleigh have family spread throughout the state as well as friends from other parts of the country, including California where Ashleigh attended college.

“We had quite a lot of people coming from different parts of the country, so it was a nice space to accommodate everything,” Ashleigh said.



Photos by Matt Long Photography

Ashleigh and Ray Carlson use the neon lights of the historic Murray Hotel for a wedding photograph in 2018 at the Livingston Depot.

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Ashleigh and Ray Carlson kiss in the courtyard of the Livingston Depot Center.

Depot, from Page 5 _____

The couple planned an outdoor ceremony in the Depot's courtyard, but woke up on their wedding day to cold temperatures and snow. They were quickly able to move everything inside and used the building's architecture, both inside and out, to make for memorable wedding photographs.

"It's such a great picturesque place," Ashleigh said. "It's a very cool place to take pictures."

McCarthy Cota agreed. She said the Depot operates as a museum with exhibits from May through September, with multiple events planned during those months in the facility's courtyard.

The Depot also hosts rehearsal dinners, receptions and other wedding-related events within the exhibit, where gatherings are commonly structured as a cocktail party or a networking event in addition to the outdoor gatherings where people are seated, giving guests the opportunity to mingle among the indoor exhibit or in the courtyard.

"Guests really like the opportunity to walk around the exhibit while the bridal party is busy taking photos," McCarthy Cota said. "The guests really enjoy perusing the art and history exhibits."

At the end of September, the Depot's exhibits are dismantled and the interior of the building is available for use as "an elegant event hall," she said.

"One thing that makes the Depot different is, as a small nonprofit, part of our mission statement is promoting economic development," McCarthy Cota said. "There's a lot of event venues that are all-inclusive. We are the exact opposite."

She said the Depot encourages people to hire a local caterer, photographer, baker, bar server, band, DJ, or other service provider.

"We've worked with most, if not all, of the caterers in the area and statewide," McCarthy Cota said.

Some couples have even chosen to go the do-it-yourself route, recruiting aunts, cousins and other family members to pull together a potluck meal during the reception. She said the facility is available to rent throughout the year, and at a discounted price for members of the Depot.

"It's incredibly affordable, especially because we're not all-inclusive" she said.

Another reason couples particularly enjoy booking the Depot for weddings, she said, is the fact that little or no effort is required to make for a memorable event in the facility.

"The space is so elegant that they don't have to do anything," McCarthy Cota said. "All they have to do is show up and everything looks classy."

For more information, contact McCarthy Cota at 406-222-2300 or email getinvolved@livingstondepot.org.

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