

2010 Mazel Tov! *Jewish Wedding Guide*

Chuppah unites Jewish-Christian branches of families

By ELAINE MARKOWITZ
Jewish Press

Choosing a wedding canopy, a chuppah, was an easy decision in days gone by — a family tallit (prayer shawl) was stretched over four poles.

Many chuppahs nowadays have become grand artistic or floral creations.

Some chuppahs today are customized, taking on a special larger meaning, as family keepsakes are used and the chuppahs are handmade.

On Oct. 25, 2009, when Elliot Fitzgerald, 26, son of Sandy and Herb Brasch of St. Petersburg, married Elizabeth Stewart, 32, the



The chuppah, created by the bride's mother, included personal items from both families including a challah cover, center, from the bridegroom's grandmother, Bunnie Katz.

chuppah was even more special because it was made by the bride's Christian mother. Elizabeth is the daughter of Melinda and Rev. Gary Stewart of Durham, NC.

Elliot and Elizabeth were married in the courtyard garden at Congregation B'nai Israel, in a ceremony conducted by Rabbi Jacob Luski. Joining the bride and bridegroom under the chuppah were both sets of parents.

At first glance the two families appear to differ greatly. Elizabeth's brother, Mark, is a Christian missionary in the Czech Republic. Elliot's brother, Benjamin, is a student at the University of Florida. The bride's father is a non-denominational Christian minister; the groom's mother is steeped in Jewish life. Sandy, a lifelong member of Congregation B'nai Israel, is currently the youth director and family program director for the synagogue.

However, the Brasch family did not focus on differences, Sandy said, but instead saw similarities in family values and mutual love for the young couple.

"There were more similarities than differences," she said, "and the chuppah symbolizes the building of a new home with meaningful parts of both families."

Elizabeth Stewart went through a Conser-

vative conversion in northern Virginia, with all four parents attending her conversion ceremony.

"Elizabeth delved into every aspect of Judaism," Sandy said, "from theology to tradition to ritual practices."

The bride's family was equally enthused. "We love him to death," Melinda Stewart, the bride's mother, said of the bridegroom. "When we see Elizabeth and Elliot together we feel this is God's wish for them."

Before the wedding, Elizabeth already had given thought to the chuppah. She wanted something special.

Her mother offered to make one and the bride said she was thrilled.



Rabbi Jacob Luski conducts the wedding ceremony for Elizabeth Stewart and Elliot Fitzgerald in the courtyard of Congregation B'nai Israel on Oct 29, 2009.

Photo by ART LOUIS, Newport News, VA

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