

THE WHITE HOUSE OF LYNWOOD'

For many, married life begins here

By Ivan Crosbie Staff Writer

It could be called the "White House of Lynwood" from its appearance which stands out conspicuously, overlooking other buildings of varying colors and sizes on Long Beach Boulevard, Lynwood.

But the Center of Faith Chapel—as it is called—one of the largest wedding chapels in the Southeast in which hundreds of couples from all-over this area have been wedded, is apparently more than what it appears to be.

For one thing it might be the only wedding chapel in the Southeast that is operated solely by a woman, who is a reverend, who is black.

"I felt I had two strikes against me when I first came here," explained Rev. Lillie Jordan, owner and operator of the chapel. "One being that I'm a female minister; the other being that I'm a black person."

"But receiving compliments from people of all races has tremendously eased this concern. Since she took over the chapel about two years ago, Rev. Jordan said she has performed between 800-1,000 weddings for people of all races in the Southeast.

She said she has performed all kinds of weddings: weddings for people coming into the chapel off the streets with little or no money to pay her fees; weddings for people who were not attired for the occasion.

"Suppose a couple come to me to be married, but they're not dressed for the occasion," she explained. "Suppose they are wearing tennis shoes and just plain street clothes. If the woman decides she wants to wear a bridal gown, we can provide that gown for her right here."

The same thing, she continued, can be done for the man. "We can provide suitable clothing for him that would make him look as presentable as if he was wearing his own outfit."

Although Rev. Jordan can and has provided such wedding attire to several of the couples she has married, the chapel does not have a display of wedding clothing either to rent or to sell.

What she does in cases when couples ask her to marry them, who are not attired suitably for the occasion, is to lend the man her jacket and the woman her daughter's wedding gown.

This procedure began about two years ago during her first marriage performance and has been repeated dozens of times over the years.

Her first marriage, for instance, was done for a young Mexican couple who wandered into the chapel one day to get married.

The prospective bride, whose parents were in Mexico, did not want her relatives to know about her marriage. Thus neither of them wanted to purchase wedding clothing, fearing it might stimulate their relatives' suspicion. But they both wanted to be dressed-up for the occasion.

To solve this problem, Rev. Jordan said she remembered that her daughter, who was married the preceding year, had her wedding gown somewhere in the chapel.

The gown had not been washed since it was originally worn, but it looked as if it had just been cleaned, she explained. This gown was given to the bride.

Similarly, a black jacket, which belongs to Rev. Jordan, was given to the groom. The jacket looks like a man's. After the marriage was performed and wedding photos taken, the couple, she said, looked "fantastic" in the photos as if they were wearing their own clothing.

That initial occurrence had set a precedence which was followed by dozens of other couples. "After that," she recalled, "several black men had put on my jacket to get married. And they looked fantastic."

Performing wedding ceremonies, however, is only one aspect of the chapel's function. It is also the meeting place where counseling is provided for couples planning to get married.

One of the counseling sessions which has made a vivid impression on Rev. Jordan was that of another young Mexican couple who wanted to get married.

The man was 18 years old. The woman was 16. According to the reverend, whenever a woman is under the age of 16, she is required to take counseling prior to marriage.

One of the difficulties they encountered is that the man was serving full time in the U.S. Arm Services. This created a problem for him in getting time off to attend the counseling sessions.

"He made three sessions here," she recalled. "During his final session, he asked if I thought he would get his marriage license when he went Downtown Los Angeles. I said, 'Yes. I think you will.'"

When he returned the next day with the necessary papers, he asked her how much she would charge to marry them. "I told him to name his price. He gave a big smile and replied '\$10.'"

"I said, 'You got it! I married them for \$10.' Unusually the price the reverend charges for marrying a couple is \$45. But the cumulative price for counsel and marriage ranges from \$45-75, she said.

"I think what I'm trying to say is that we've been giving freely, we've not lost anything." Prior to buying the chapel, Rev. Jordan had performed several marriages in a church she operated in Compton.

That church, unfortunately, was abandoned after a fire destroyed most of the building one night. Without a church of her own, she said, she and her family, consisting of five sons and one daughter, had no choice but to join several other assemblies in the area.

Two years ago, however, their search for a suitable building ended when they heard that the chapel in Lynwood was up for sale.

"Initially, we weren't looking for a wedding chapel," she explained. "We were looking for a church. After we saw this place, the Lord directed us to buy it."

When they approached the owner and asked him to sell them the place, he agreed. "It was as easy as that. We've never been in a wedding chapel-type business before. We just walked into it."

Her daughter, who has been doing the wedding photography, had no previous experience in the art when they bought the place. However, under the instruction of the owner, she learned some of the techniques in a short period of time.

LONG-TIME LYNWOOD BUSINESSMAN

Pageantry expands business

By Ivan Crosbie Staff Writer

Bill Lomas, owner of Pageantry Trophy in Lynwood, has spent sleepless nights during the past 23 years working to build his business from a relatively small, non-competitive firm to the leading manufacturer of trophies and awards in the Southeast.

It began like most ordinary businesses in the area, he explained, starting from scratch and blossoming into a multimillion dollar corporation.

But Lomas's corporation is no ordinary business. In fact, the company conducts an unusual combination of businesses.

Not only does he manufacture some of the most elegant trophies and awards in the Southeast, but also he is one of the top parade and movie decorators in the area.

The company creates an extensive assortment of specialty trophies and awards, which are usually ordered by reputable organizations, clubs and similar groups.

Most of these specialty orders are created for golf and tennis tournaments, and for baseball and basketball awards. It also manufactures awards for

motion picture and television studios, and for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Some of the company's trophy creations include the Olympic Series, the Prince Charles Collection, the American Cup Series, the Gold and Silver Series, and the Hand-Crafted Quality Series.

The awards series include the Popular Price Medals, Special Customized Plaques, Brown Brass Plates, Traditional Walnut Plaques as Modern as Tomorrow, and the Brilliant Life Like XXX Series.

In addition to his trophies, Lomas has gained a statewide reputation for his spectacular Christmas and parade decorations.

His company coordinates parades for cities throughout the Southland, including Lynwood and South Gate.

He said that each parade is "tailored" to what the community wants. "From corn celebrations to mule days, each town has its own speciality."

The parade has gradually earned a reputation for professionalism in judging, a business that has grown more precise over the years, Lomas said.

"When I first started in this business, sometimes a mayor might have been designate all the functions for three other businesses," he explained. "One being the business in which we decorate hotels all across the area."

"And we have a business where we rent stages, chairs, and so forth. "We also have the parade production company, which is our major company. We produce 65 parades a year. This is done throughout the state."

selected to be the judge," he recalled. "If he liked our bands in blue uniforms, and you wore red, you were out."

Lomas became involved in parades as an offshoot of his trophy business. He expanded both enterprises gradually through contacts, growing expertise and favor-exchanging.

"This is a year-round business," he explained. "We do a lot of guest speaking at annual banquets and things like that."

Over the years as Pageantry grew, he expanded the business by adding several different companies.

These include the addition of a float-building company, which provides entries for the Rose Parade and others; a promotional company that handles trade show and special events' decorations, and a travel company packaging

Over the past 23 years, however, Pageantry has spread its wings from its Lynwood-based headquarters to cities outside of California.

Here in the Southeast, though, the company manufactures its trophies and ships them out to customers "all-over" the place, Lomas said.

"Our offices here coordinate all the functions for three other businesses," he explained. "One being the business in which we decorate hotels all across the area."

"And we have a business where we rent stages, chairs, and so forth. "We also have the parade production company, which is our major company. We produce 65 parades a year. This is done throughout the state."

He said that the trophy company stands on its own in "retail sales. We service our own products. And anything we need trophies for, we make them."

As one of the suppliers for the 1984 Olympics, Lomas said he has already manufactured torches and other special trophy awards for the Olympics Organizing Committee.

Not only is the growth of the company reflected in its expansion, but it is also shown in the computerized machinery it now uses to perform most of its engravings.

In earlier years, engravings for Pageantry's diverse creations were done manually. But to keep up with customers' demands, the company had to also keep up with the advances in technology.

Since the installation of computerized engravers and the expansion of its business in different directions during the past few years, the company has set record sales.

At a time when the nation's economy is at an all-time low, when several Southeast companies had to close doors because of the recession, business at Pageantry continues better than ever.

The chapel, which occupies half a block on Long Beach Boulevard between Magnolia and Lavina Streets, is adjacent to an old abandoned theatre building, which has been unused for several years.

From a distance, the theatre and the chapel appear as one building. This and other reasons have prompted Rev. Jordan and members of her family to attempt purchasing the theatre.

Several attempts were made, but were fruitless. Despite these disappointments, she insisted that someday the theatre will become a part of the Center of Faith Chapel.