



MASTER WEDDING PLANNER™ FRANK J. ANDONOPLAS, MWP™

Frank Event Design, Chicago
ABC Member Since: 1993

Employees: 1 full-time, 6 part-time

Revenue Breakdown: 70% full-service consulting,
10% commissions, 20% rentals

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L to R: This wedding reflected the couple's style by putting a twist on tradition and "bringing back the sequin"—photo by Riverbend Studio, Inc.; a tropical-themed event featured backlit tables and chameleon chairs—photo courtesy of Frank Event Design; cutting-edge design and Old Hollywood glam combined to create an unforgettable New Year's Eve wedding—photo by Rick Aguilar Studios.

FAMILY: My husband, Shawn, and I were finally able to be married on our 25th anniversary together. We have a pedigreed, 17-year-old Bichon Frise named Fenwick Ambercrombie Gaylord.

EDUCATION: I attended DePaul University in Chicago (where I now teach) for a business degree.

GETTING STARTED: While pursuing my banking career, I helped friends with their weddings just as the wedding consulting industry was starting in the late 1980s, early 1990s. When I saw *Father of the Bride*, the movie with Steve Martin, I had an epiphany. When they said the wedding planner's name was "Franck," I thought, "Really?" Then, when they showed his salon, very loudly I proclaimed, "This is what I want to do with my life." I realized I had loved weddings since I was a child, so I started a part-time business. At my first industry conference in 1993, I was told (by Miss Dorothy Penner) I would be successful in this industry because I had passion. Shortly after not getting the promotion I was promised, I left the bank. The rest is history.

ON BEING A MWP™: I knew I wanted this when I saw the first three people receive the designation at my first conference in Nashville. Back then, we had to go through the ranks and earn our PBC™ and ABC™ titles first. It took me seven years. I became, I think, the 21st Master Bridal Consultant™ (now Master Wedding Planner™) in 1999, and proud to say the first man to receive the designation.

MEMBERSHIPS: Member of the ABC and the Catering Executives Club of America, past member of International Special Events Society and the National Association for Catering and Events.

GOALS: I want to continue my success, ease up in the number of weddings I take each year,

increase my teaching schedule, work for one of the wedding magazines, and write a book.

MENTORS: Teddy Lenderman. I met her when she got her MBC™. Then, I really got to know her at the Hawaii conference, where she asked me to be in the book she was writing. I was in all five editions. I called her when I had a question, and she was always there to help. Now, she calls me if she has a question. (It freaks me out.) She and I have spoken together at conferences, and she is not only a trusted colleague but also extended family.

INSPIRATION: Fashion and interior design. I go to trade shows and seminars all over the country every year to know what is the latest in our industry. Then, I have this information to pass on to my clients. Knowledge is power.

MARKETING STRATEGY: I spend money on what gives me a good ROI [return on investment]. I know what my clients are looking at and invest there.

ON THE WEDDING MARKET: The luxury market usually holds strong in down times. But as things are getting better, people are being less cautious about buying decisions.

STAYING FRESH: I attend The Special Event Conference. I get so many great ideas and resources from this amazing conference. And get to see many colleagues from across the country.

ON EDUCATION: I attend the Wedding MBA, The Special Event, and the Catersource/Event Solutions conferences. Engage! is now on my list, but timing usually is an issue for me.

IDEAL CLIENT: One who trusts me completely, who I get and who gets me, and who can afford me.

ON READING: I read everything wedding I can get my hands on—books, magazines, blogs.

ON FREE TIME: What is free time? (Ha!) I have learned to balance work and family life. It's a challenge, but it's the advice I give to everyone starting out. I love to bake. I love theatre. I love to play slots. I love to stay home and watch TV with my husband.

IN THE MEDIA: In local and national print publications as well as television including: *Brides*, *Modern Bride*, *Elegant Bride*, *Modern Luxury Brides*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Chicago Sun Times*, *The Pioneer Press*, *Event Solutions Magazine*, *Special Events Magazine*, *Wedding Planner Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Crain's Chicago Business*, *The New York Times*, "The Early Show," "20/20," and "Get Married."

WORDS OF WISDOM: Don't hang out your shingle until you have done your homework. Clients are hiring you because you have knowledge. If you are calling yourself a consultant, and don't know the answers to their questions immediately then you are not ready. Do the research. Do the homework. Also, balance of family and work life is vital, or you will burn out and/or wind up in divorce court.

ON GIVING BACK: I was ABC Illinois State Coordinator from 1996-2002. I serve on the *Special Events Magazine* and *Wedding Planner Magazine* advisory boards, the DePaul University School of Hospitality Advisory Board, the ISES Board of Directors, served as NICE Awards Co-chair, Gala Awards and WedStyle Awards judge, was a speaker at many national conferences, have been on the Penton Special Events Education Committee, serve as a DePaul University Student Advisor, serve on the Miss Dorothy Heart Award committee (and am a past recipient), and I even pick up dog poop that is not Fenwick's. ••