



hurricane heroes

These local vendors pulled off a wedding in a destroyed botanical garden just three weeks after Hurricane Irma.

BY STEPHANIE CAIN PHOTOGRAPHY BY KAITY BRAWLEY PHOTOGRAPHY

When Chelsea Turner-Lange traveled to Tennessee on September 6 to ride out Hurricane Irma, she doubted her wedding celebration with fiancé Jacob Pytlik, scheduled three weeks later, would actually go as planned. But thanks to the hard work of local wedding pros and the kindness of dozens of strangers, the pair wed in the first celebration at Naples Botanical Garden since the storm.

Chelsea had her heart set on the lush venue since she began the planning process. Her grandfather, Win Turner, is a longtime supporter, so she grew up watching the flora and fauna flourish. “From the time I was old enough to think about my wedding, it has been the only place I wanted to have it,” she says.

The garden’s landscape, though, was devastated by the hurricane. “We estimate a third of the plant material was lost,” Kara Laufer, the garden’s director of communications, says. “We have enough plant debris to fill two football fields at six feet deep.” More than 300 trees were felled, destroying the canopy, with some ripped completely out of the ground. Orchids suffered sunburn and disease, and the property’s electrical and irrigation systems saw damage. Watching the storm from afar, Chelsea tried to remain optimistic.

By September 12, the team at the Garden jumped into action. A crew of more than 100 volunteers, 30 garden professionals from

as far away as the botanical gardens in Chicago and St. Louis and even Chelsea’s mother, Elizabeth Turner, and grandfather started laboring daily to repair the grounds. Debris was cleared, trees replanted and flowers added, especially to the area where ceremony would be held. It seemed the wedding would commence on September 30.

Other vendors also stepped up. Lurcat Catering, which also runs the on-site Fogg Café supported the renewal process by feeding the volunteers each day. Their executive chef, Jack Raben, worked to source menu items for the wedding despite limited availability and a skeleton staff. Isn’t She Lovely Florals managed to craft a bloom-filled arbor for the ceremony on Performance Lawn. Luster Designs’s Summer Russell, still awaiting power on the 28th to print the programs, was ready to haul a borrowed generator to the shop when the electricity came back on. On the wedding day, the garden used generators to power the twinkle lights draped by Tech-Tronics Productions Inc. and DJ Maliké’s sound system that kept the dance floor packed inside the property’s Kapnick Hall.

“It was all I dreamed of and more,” Chelsea says of the final result. “I could never put into words how insanely grateful I am for every one of my amazing vendors and my incredible family and friends. It was truly the best day of my life.”

INGREDIENTS CEREMONY & RECEPTION SITE Naples Botanical Garden, Naples **PHOTOGRAPHY** Kaity Brawley Photography **PLANNER** Rhea Merrill/Lurcat Catering & Naples Botanical Garden **FLOWERS** Isn’t She Lovely Florals **STATIONERY & PROGRAMS** Luster Designs on Paper **LIGHTING & DRAPING** Tech-Tronics Productions Inc. **LINENS** Connie Duglin Speciality Linen **CATERING** Lurcat Catering **CEREMONY MUSIC** Bonita Strings **RECEPTION MUSIC** DJ Maliké