

# Southern Living®

AUGUST 2009

**72  
Great  
New  
Looks  
From Our  
Idea Houses**

**Save up  
to 75%  
off top  
hotels**  
page 32

**BONUS SECTION**  
Georgia Living:  
People & Places

**Dinner  
in a Flash**

**11 Easy Recipes  
In 30 Minutes  
Or Less!**

**Exclusive!**  
**Pat Conroy's  
Charleston**

- Read an excerpt from his new novel
- Take a tour of the town he loves



Here comes the bride. The Thomas-Strong wedding turns a hot summer day into a beautiful event at Gin Creek.

# Joyful Gatherings at Gin Creek

A South Georgia farm family hosts picture-perfect weddings on their rural slice of paradise. BY **JOE RADA**



Doug (on tractor) and Richie DeMott sprinkle their dirt lane to keep the dust down before hundreds of wedding guests arrive.

Here's an odd sight. Two middle-aged farmers hitch a water tank to a tractor and gently sprinkle a dirt road while wearing tuxedos, bow ties, shiny black shoes, and smiles. "We usually do this right before a crowd arrives," says Richie DeMott as he and his brother, Doug, take up the task. "Otherwise 100 cars or more can kick up a lot of dust on a country road like ours."

There's a wedding today at the edge of a lovely lake in a tree-shaded corner of their South Georgia spread. Members of the catering-savvy DeMott clan, plus neighbors and friends, attend to every detail: setting chairs on grass, transporting the bride via golf cart to a gazebo-based ceremony, cutting the cake, spinning dance tunes, and more. The DeMotts have turned their 42-acre oasis near Hartfield (35 miles south of Albany) into a popular venue named Gin Creek.

**Calling All DeMotts** Richie's wife, Brenda, and Doug's wife, Christina, serve as wedding planners and caterers. Richie and Brenda's schoolteacher daughter, Kelli, handles public relations. Their son, Max, a grad student at The University of Georgia, acts as sound technician and DJ for different events.

PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTLAND RICHARDS

## PEOPLE & PLACES



A glassed-in reception hall under the pines shelters receptions for up to 250 guests.



"We take care of every little detail," says Gin Creek's Brenda DeMott, lighting a ribbon-accented torch along a garden path.

Doug's daughter Meaghan, a Valdosta State University student, switches from server to dishwasher to chauffeur. "One of my jobs is to drive the golf cart that brings the bride from the cabin where she dresses to the ceremony location," she explains.

Richie and Doug's sisters, Rhonda Sauls and Kay Powell, and their mother, Dorothy DeMott Turner, help out with everything from bookkeeping to punch serving. Cousins Mitzi Edwards and Jackie Sloan lend their talents as decorators. Other relatives and friends are on call as photographers, florists, vocalists, limo drivers, and even a hot-air balloon pilot. "This is a group effort, for sure," Doug says. "It has grown quickly from a little sideline to a major undertaking that no one branch of the family could handle."

"Our dad grew tobacco here and dug out this lake. After his death, our mother built the original lake house as a place for the family to relax," Richie says. "We're still farmers at heart—with corn, peanuts, and soybeans growing just beyond the tree line—but running Gin Creek has become our main focus."

When not playing the role of genteel hosts, the DeMott brothers stay busy adding facilities as needed. In the shade of tall pines, broad oaks, and aromatic cedars stand rustic cabins, a glassed-in galleria, garden paths, flowery trellises, photogenic footbridges and swans, the centerpiece gazebo, and more. A horse-drawn carriage, an antique Rolls-Royce limo, a pontoon boat, and other amenities stand ready for action.

**A Toast to Gin Creek** "We thought we'd be hosting family reunions and corporate retreats, but it's almost entirely weddings," Richie says. "We figured if we did 10 weddings a year, we'd be fine. Well, the first year we did 19, the second year 39, the third year 59, and it keeps growing. Every Saturday and most Fridays and Sundays are booked."

In the process, everyone in the family has developed new sets of expertise. "We've all become specialists at a few things and versatile at everything," Richie says. "Me, I serve as emcee a lot, introducing people and keeping the program moving." He breaks into a grin and raises an imaginary Champagne glass as he adds, "So I've gotten pretty good at proposing toasts." ●

GIN CREEK: 251 DeMott Road, Hartsfield, GA 31756; [www.gincreek.com](http://www.gincreek.com) or 1-877-446-2733.

### How May They Serve You?

Here are some of the services Gin Creek provides.

- Catered receptions at a glassed-in hall
- Lodging in lakeside cabins
- Indoor and outdoor dance floors, with DJ
- Tables, chairs, and dishes to serve hundreds
- Limo, horse-drawn carriage, and golf cart shuttles, with drivers
- Tents in various sizes, rigged for power and lights
- Cakes for all occasions
- Fountains (including water, Champagne, and chocolate versions)
- Floral arrangements
- Photographers (still or video)
- Quail hunting (this is, after all, a working farm in an area known for hunting preserves)