

REAL WEDDINGS: KRISTA VODA AND PHILLIP KELLEY

By Veronica Kawka | Whirl Weddings

Although this pair is quite familiar with the fast-paced world of race car driving, Krista Voda and Phillip Kelley took it slow when it came to their relationship. Their TV connection first brought them together — Krista is a reporter for NASCAR on Fox and Phil is an independent contractor for sports television. “We dated five-and-a-half years before we got married,” says Krista. “A lot of the people we worked with kind of assumed we already were.”

Phil turned one of their yearly traditions, visiting Rockefeller Center during the holiday season, into an unforgettable moment. “We stopped to do a picture we take every year in front of the Christmas tree. It was packed with people, and I turned around, and he was down on one knee,” says Krista. Phil arranged for a photographer friend (who was hiding in the bushes before the proposal) to be there and capture the entire experience. The two celebrated with their friends later that night at the annual end-of-the-year NASCAR awards banquet, which Krista says basically turned into their engagement party.

I Love Pittsburgh

A love of their hometown cities — Krista is from Clinton, Iowa, and Phil is from Mars, Pa. — combined with modern touches to make the wedding extra special. Two-hundred-and-twenty guests attended, and many of them were out-of-towners from a total of 18 states and two countries. The couple did their best to make sure that everyone experienced Pittsburgh to the fullest extent. From the wedding ceremony in Downtown Pittsburgh to the reception at the Embassy Suites Hotel at Pittsburgh International Airport, guests got to travel across town and absorb city life. “Showing off Pittsburgh was really important to us. We wanted to make sure that people who flew all the way into Pittsburgh didn’t just see a hotel ballroom,” said Krista.

Tale of Two Cities

To emphasize their “travel and the cities we travel to” theme, the couple gave their out-of-town guests gift bags upon arrival. Items included personalized mints that read “Krista & Phillip: Mint to Be,” an Iowa-themed travel guide, postcard, and notepad, and a book, Sam McCool’s *New Pittsburghese: How to Speak Like a Pittsburgher*. Krista also created a detailed, tri-fold itinerary pamphlet, welcoming guests to their “winter wedding weekend,” which culminated on Sunday afternoon with football watching at Phil and Krista’s house. Guests got a tour of the town, starting with a rehearsal dinner at Firewaters on the North Shore, followed by visits to the Rivers Casino, Heinz Field, and PNC Park.

Beat the Heat

Krista managed to save money on her venue and wedding services by scheduling her wedding in January as opposed to the busier spring and summer wedding seasons. (Winter is also Phil’s favorite time of year!) Instead, they splurged on buses so that transportation for their visiting guests was a breeze all weekend.

Church Search

Krista and Phil wanted to get married in an old stone church, and so, they set off on a search of Downtown Pittsburgh. They decided on First Lutheran Church, “one of the four big beautiful churches Downtown,” because it allows non-members to marry, “and because it’s absolutely beautiful. It was perfect,” says Krista.

Couture Cut

Krista tried on tons of dresses before finally selecting her simple fit-and-flare Mikaela gown from The Exquisite Bride in Murrysville. The bride went dress shopping with her mom, and after narrowing the field down to two gowns, selected the dress that mom liked best! “For me, it was a way to include her in, and honor her with, one of the biggest decisions!” says Krista. The fitted dress featured a whimsical flower and feather detail and a row of buttons running down the back. Krista also had a matching bolero on hand to wear during the outdoor pictures,

though she didn't need it as expected — their January wedding day was surprisingly mild!

Make It Special

Krista and Phil planned the wedding with the help of family and friends, especially their friend Molly Grantham, who helped with “all things paper,” including addressing invitations and creating the name cards and table settings, each featuring a picture of the couple posing in a different city. During cocktail hour, guests carried flutes filled with bubbly on personalized napkins that read, “Eat, Drink, and Be Married.” Also special was their first dance — Krista's 16-year-old nephew was unable to attend the wedding because of a wrestling meet, so they found a way for him to be included too. They asked him to pick out their first dance song, a romantic and edgy slow rock number.

Winter Wonderland

Natural elements added an ultra-modern, yet natural touch to the décor at the reception. Krista and Phil embraced the winter theme by adding white birch sticks to their floral arrangements, created by Bettis Floral, of white and cream hydrangeas, highlighted with pops of greenery. Champagne and chocolate-colored decorations adorned the wedding reception in honor of Phil's “sweet tooth,” and Cakes by Tammy baked up a cake with the Pittsburgh skyline stenciled in black and white icing. Sweetening the deal were the wedding favors — cream cheese mints and personalized chocolate bars made by family members.