

Coronavirus: Jacksonville doctors wed in backyard ceremony amid virus precautions

By [Teresa Stepzinski](#)

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A pair of young Jacksonville doctors tied the knot in a simple, social distancing, backyard ceremony Saturday after family, friends and other well-wishers held a car parade in their honor.

Love amid the coronavirus pandemic for two young Jacksonville doctors getting married meant face masks and backyard nuptials instead of a Club Continental ceremony.

It also meant a surprise drive-by parade boasting an authentic-looking, three-tier wedding cake replica, balloons, homemade signs and a chorus of paper party horns.

It might not have been the wedding Will Stross and Staci Biegner originally planned, but the couple exchanged their vows with love and joy Saturday afternoon in a small, intimate ceremony attended by about 14 family members and friends.

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The typical stress of organizing a wedding multiplied exponentially as the coronavirus swept across the country, Stross said.

“We’ve been putting a lot of work in over the last few weeks. It was very stressful at the beginning to not know what we were going to do,” Stross said.

That uncertainty, however, soon vanished.

“But once we decided that we wanted to keep our date, and we just wanted to focus on each other and get married ...,” Stross said.

“This ended up being what we didn’t know we wanted,” said Biegner, sharing her husband’s thought.

Biegner, 29, is a doctor in the Obstetrics-Gynecology Residency Program at the University of Florida College of Medicine-Jacksonville.

Stross, also 29, is a radiation oncologist at the Mayo Clinic Jacksonville residency program.

The couple met in medical school — Florida State University College of Medicine.

“He was in the class above me, and we worked together a lot in first and second year. We started dating my third year and his fourth year of medical school,” she said.

Luckily, she said, they both matched up in Jacksonville for their residency programs. He’s at Mayo Clinic, and she’s at UF Health.

"It's worked out wonderfully," he said.

Biegner said they'd originally planned to be married at Club Continental in Orange Park with a guest list of about 135 family members, friends and colleagues.

The coronavirus pandemic made that impossible.

The couple already were concerned about preventing exposure to the virus because of their jobs.

Once the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said no large gatherings of 50 people or more until at least April 30, Biegner said they scrubbed the Club Continental wedding plan.

They decided to reschedule.

"It was a little bit stressful at first, but we figured the end product is the same. We're now married and actually it's really nice to have a small, intimate environment with just close family and friends," she said.

Her mother, Irene Biegner, a registered nurse, hosted the scaled-down nuptials at her home. His sister-in-law, Trista Carraher, performed the ceremony.

His mother, Becky Carraher, was among those instrumental in coordinating the surprise parade involving some of the couple's relatives, friends and colleagues who couldn't attend because of the social distancing restrictions.

Gathering clandestinely at a convenience store about a block away and out-of-sight from the wedding party, they decorated their cars with balloons, posters, brightly colored paper garlands, ribbons and the replica wedding cake.

After exchanging their vows, the couple and wedding party walked around to the front of the house for photographs.

That's when the parade of well-wishers — a festive mini-convoy of about a dozen vehicles — drove by slowing to congratulate the couple.

Stross said initially they were going to honeymoon in Costa Rica but travel plans for that are on hold.

"But we are going up to Amelia Island and do a little mini-moon and enjoy some time together," Stross said of the abbreviated honeymoon.

Ideally, Becky Carraher said the couple will be able to renew their vows and have a celebration in September with those who couldn't attend Saturday because of the social distancing restrictions.

Biegner said everything has worked out for the best — even the weather.

Drizzling rain showers cleared and the sun came out just in time for the outdoor ceremony Saturday.

"I feel like we have the most luck possible," Biegner said.

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