

BEHIND THE PHOTOGRAPH

By **SPENCER TULIS**

FINGER LAKES TIMES

Things are going well for Cindy Banas and Norm Coleman. You might even say "it's a wonderful life."

The couple was wed March 7 on the bridge over the Cayuga-Seneca Canal in Seneca Falls — the same bridge many people believe was the basis for the one depicted in the classic holiday movie "It's A Wonderful Life," starring Jimmy Stewart.

Cindy and Norm, both 53, are not from this area. He is originally from California and still works there. She is originally from New Jersey and now lives in Henryville, Pa.

They met in 1977 when both of their best friends, Auri and Marybeth Naggar, dated and eventually married. Through that couple, they stayed in contact as friends over the years, regardless of the distance separating them.

In 1997, on a trip to visit the Naggars in California, Cindy and Norm's friendship became something more, and the two have carried on a serious long-distance relationship since.

As an administrator for a private school, Norm gets summers off, which means more face time with Cindy. After this school year, he plans to move to Henryville to be with his wife full-time.

In this regular column, a *Times* staff photographer goes beyond a typical caption to tell what's at the heart of a photo they've made.



Norm has always been a major fan of "It's A Wonderful Life." Cindy is also a fan and particularly loves the sentiment of it and its inspirational message. She says Norm — who has much of the script committed to memory — is an expert when it comes to trivia about the film.

Cindy believes she has met no other person that so closely possesses the decent qualities of the George Bailey character than her guy Norm.

So, it seemed natural when the time came to get married that the movie would play some sort of role.

When the two did a search on the Internet for Bedford Falls, Seneca Falls came up. They had never heard of the place but were intrigued. After a few phone calls to the village, the couple was amazed

at the incredible enthusiasm, friendliness and effort that locals made to make their dream wedding come true.

Norm wanted to get married on the bridge at 11:30 a.m. Why so early? He wanted as much of the day as possible to be a married man, including having lunch in town with his new bride.

Because friends and family are scattered so far away, they decided to keep the ceremony small. So small, in fact, that the two witnesses recruited for the happy event were Seneca Falls Police Chief Frederick Capozzi and Seneca Falls Supervisor Pete Same. Town Justice Joyce "Bonnie" Mahoney performed the ceremony.

The only other observers were myself and the vice president of the village's Its A Wonderful Life Committee, John Wood, who presented several theme-related gifts to the couple.

There is little doubt Norm and Cindy will never forget their special wedding day. A big reason for that is because the people of Seneca Falls opened up their arms, minds and hearts, continuing to show everyone why where we live and work is pretty darn "wonderful."

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