

500 couples agree: Marriage is great

Ripley's fails to break record of number renewing their vows, but the couples had fun anyway

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By LINDSAY WILES GRAMANA, Special to The Record
Hundreds of couples gathered on balconies and in the parking lot at Ripley's Believe It or Not! to renew their wedding vows on Sunday.

By ANTHONY DeMATTEO
Special to the Record

From the balcony above, news came quickly to men and women re-married Sunday in the parking lot of Ripley's Believe It or Not! that their effort to break a Guinness World Record for vow renewals failed.

But to the approximately 500 couples falling short of the 1,087 couples needed to break the mark, the day meant more.

To St. Augustine's Doreen and Mark Grantham, it meant fun.

Married 13 years, the couple sat in beach chairs in a spot of shaded asphalt before the mass ceremony.

"I'm surprised he showed up to our first wedding," Doreen Grantham said. "I got married on April Fool's Day just in case he didn't show."

Mark Grantham said his marriage today is "as good as the first day — actually, probably better" as his wife yelled "Liar!" from her chair.

He said, for him, the day wasn't about breaking a record. "It's for us."

Timothy and Tracie Seager of Keystone Heights were married again Sunday in purple — renewing 12-year-old vows in head-to-toe Baltimore Ravens garb.

"We always wanted to do this again, and in his home state," Tracie Seager said of her Miami-born husband.

Nearby, two couples from DeLand dressed in warring wedding attire: one pair in the blue and orange of the University of Florida and the other in Florida State University's garnet and gold.

"We wanted to stand out," said Gators wife Robyn Schmidt, wearing an opaque orange and blue veil beside her husband, Rob. "The gowns and suits — that was so 30 years ago. This is who we are now."

Seminoles wife Sue Davis said that after 24 years, marriage is about compromise.

Her husband Jim Davis had another take.

"Best thing I ever did," he said, inspiring a smile and hug from his wife.

Five minutes before the 2 p.m. ceremony of vows, one white, heart-shaped balloon escaped the crowd, taking off above the old museum's roof to greater heights until the wind blew it into power lines above a convenience store, shredding it on impact.

No bride or groom watched the balloon's end, instead repeating vows from a pastor on the balcony, kissing and throwing confetti in the air after a little prompting from Ripley's staff. Couples then quickly fled east to sightseeing trains or west to San Marco Avenue and free Papa John's pizza served by a crew from the restaurant in Ripley's parking lot.

In a pair of cowboy boots and a lace dress, Jacksonville's Katherine Head said she and husband, Jessie, missed the inaugural event last year and were determined to make it Sunday.

"Our anniversary is Feb. 12, so we really wanted to do this," she said. "Marriage is great. It's like getting to be with your best friend all the time."