

## CUSTOMER TESTIMONIAL

# Rustic Manor 1848

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## THEIR STORY

For most couples, planning their wedding doesn't turn into a business venture or a career opportunity. For Whitney and Eric Shneyder, it was both.

Whitney and Eric met at culinary school, fell in love and got engaged. Like most newly-engaged couples, they began planning their dream wedding. Both Whitney and Eric are outdoorsy and knew they didn't want a wedding that was super formal or over-the-top. They decided a barn wedding would be a perfect fit, but when they began looking for a venue, they couldn't find anything that met their needs — like air conditioning and indoor plumbing.

Whitney says, "It was a lightbulb moment."

**Since the couple couldn't find exactly the right type of venue for their own wedding, they set out to create it.** They began looking for a property that could serve as a small-scale wedding venue and as their new home since they wanted to live on-site. After searching for a year, they closed on the perfect property — a farmhouse in Delafield with a modest 4,000 square-foot pole barn set on 12 acres with wooded trails and meadows and surrounded by the Bark River.

## THE CHALLENGE

When Whitney and Eric first began considering opening a wedding venue, they turned to Whitney's parents for advice.

"My parents are business owners and they were big supporters of us in this venture. They said, 'You can do it. You're crazy, but you're not that crazy,'" said Whitney. "We leaned on them with a lot of questions, including how to go about financing this, and right away they said to go to First National Bank."

Not only did Whitney's parents bank with First National Bank for their business, but they lived next door to one of the bank's senior staff members and knew firsthand how committed First National Bank was to the local community and its residents.

"Everyone at First National Bank was really excited with us," Whitney said. "Every part of this process was really creative, and First National Bank was always excited and never treated us like we were too young to take this on or that the size of the project was too big for us. Other vendors and contractors we encountered along the way treated us like we were too young."

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*"Other banks are very corporate and not personal at all, and that's exactly the opposite of what we're looking for. First National Bank really knows us, and we appreciate them being part of our business." — Whitney Shneyder*

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The Shneyders purchased the property with a loan from First National Bank in October 2013, and it took about a year for them to get all their permits in order with the city. In June 2014, Whitney and Eric were the first couple married on the property — still sans air conditioning and indoor plumbing — and two weeks later they broke ground on their first major renovation.

## THE SOLUTION

Rustic Manor 1848 has been a labor of love — literally.

Both Whitney and Eric have been in the hospitality industry since they were 14 years old. With Whitney's experience at the front of the house and Eric's expertise behind the scenes, it made for a great business pairing.

"We started out thinking we were going to do something on a smaller scale," Whitney said. "Our goal for the first year in business was to do 40 weddings. We opened our doors in April of 2015, and we did 88 weddings that year. We doubled our goal, and immediately we knew we were in for something we hadn't expected."





With such high demand for their rustic style barn venue, Whitney and Eric expanded Rustic Manor 1848 two times after the initial major renovation.

“During all of our renovations we have asked our guests for their thoughts, ideas and needs to find out what amenities or accommodations they think we should add to the venue,” Whitney said. **“Rustic Manor 1848 is created specifically to what our guests have asked for.”**

In addition to growing the space to accommodate more physical guests on site, Whitney and Eric have also expanded the services they offer to meet guests’ needs.

“We listen to our clients more than most venues, and what we heard people say is, ‘I really wish you could take care of this because we haven’t found the right vendor.’ So we started adding other services pretty quickly,” Whitney said.

For example, **Rustic Manor 1848 began offering shuttle service from the venue to local hotels since none of the area hotels offer such a service.** The Shneyders also started **Manor Studios 1848, a photography and videography division** that will do photo shoots for anyone and not just at the wedding venue.

**Whitney also began offering wedding planning** after couples kept expressing a desire to have her plan their entire day. According to Whitney, the next piece is a second sister company, **Married Monthly, that will offer virtual wedding planning** for couples who are not local.

For Whitney and Eric, their biggest accomplishment is that they get to share their dream with as many people as they do.

“I thought we were setting our goal pretty high with 40 weddings that first year,” Whitney said. “Now we do more than 100 weddings a year plus 30 other events and corporate gatherings. That alone is an amazing accomplishment. If I would have known we would be operating at this level, I would have laughed.”

Whitney says the venue is now exactly how they want it to be, and the couple hopes to renovate their home next.

“We run our home as a bed and breakfast as well, so the bride and groom stay with us in the home on the night of the wedding,” Whitney said. “We would like to have a bit more privacy for them and for us by creating more of a bridal suite.”

**After working with First National Bank to finance their original purchase and additional renovations, Whitney knows that First National Bank will be a steadfast partner for whatever the future holds.**

“It’s been very comforting to know every time I have a question, no matter how little or ridiculous it might be, that I feel comfortable asking it. We didn’t know a lot of things in the beginning, and I’m sure we asked some amateurish questions, but we never got a judgmental answer.”

*“We break all the notions of what it means to be a barn venue. We are not just rustic country charm. We’ve worked really hard to create a beautiful blank slate that amazingly works with any theme, from garden, to boho, to Great Gatsby.”*

— Whitney Shneyder



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