



## **‘I do – again!’ ‘Burghers aim for Guinness Book with giant wedding vow renewal event**

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*Geri Green was never getting married. A career gal, she set out in 1964 to travel the world, working for the government. First stop: Hawaii. Perhaps a less romantic setting and her life would be completely different. As it were, after a rather successful blind date with a handsome Marine, she telegraphed her mother: “I met the man I am going to marry.”*

“I knew that night, but Mike didn’t,” Geri said. “It took him two weeks to propose.”

“I’m not a man to make any snap decisions,” added Mike.

Forty-one years later, Mike and Geri Green are still happily married, and are about to alert the world. On February 10 in the elegant Carnegie Music Hall in Oakland, they’ll join up to 699 other couples in what could enter the Guinness Book of World Records as the world’s largest wedding vow renewal ceremony.

As of early December, 572 couples were registered for Re-Union, said Leigh Kish, spokesperson for the Carnegie Museums of Art and Natural History, which is hosting the event. The current world record for couples renewing vows is 272, set in Sydney, Australia in September 2007. Museum marketing director Kitty Julian, who sits on Pittsburgh’s 250h Anniversary celebration committee, brainstormed the event.

“When we took pre-registration,” Kish said, “we found that people were so excited – they were calling, sending e-mails, all wanting to tell their story,” so many that a space for “wedding stories” was added to the e-mail registration.

“Some stories are really sad, others are heartwarming, others are funny,” Kish said. Some will be incorporated into the ceremony. Prizes will be awarded for feats such as longest married (as of December, the longest married couple registered was married on November 24, 1948!), farthest traveled, etc.

Guinness Book, notoriously fastidious about record-setting details, requires video and photographic documentation, a sign-in sheet, and a letter stating who performed the ceremony – the hope is Mayor Luke Ravenstahl will preside over the happy celebration. Kish emphasized that the ceremony is a vow renewal – couples cannot legally wed there.

“We must send a photocopy of the original marriage certificate from each couple,” Kish said. The ceremony is all-inclusive, meaning persons in same-sex and common-law marriages are welcome to participate, but their participation cannot count towards the record because their unions aren’t legally recognized in Pennsylvania.

Couples may even come in wedding gowns and tuxedos if they wish – or more specifically, if they fit. Geri Green mused, “They said I could wear my wedding dress. Mike wore his dress blues in our wedding. But I don’t know what happened over the years...they both shrunk.” She added, “He could wear his hat, maybe.”

Just like the original “special day,” this special day will end with a reception complete with wedding cake, music and champagne (and lucky couples will receive prizes), thanks to major sponsors Star 100.7 radio, Great Western Champagne and TWOgether Pittsburgh.

Each couple will receive a certificate and a bag of gifts and special offers. Plans are in the works for prizes such as a second honeymoon, spa packages and jewelry.

One not-so-flashy but important gift for each couple will be literature about TWOgether Pittsburgh, whose motto is “Help for people who are married, thinking of tying the knot – or untying it.”

TWOgether Pittsburgh is a five-year, \$8.35 million federally funded project to strengthen marriages and families in the five-county Pittsburgh area. TWOgether partners with more than 30 churches and five schools, and is a coalition of like-minded agencies such as Family Guidance, Inc. (the lead agency), the National Fatherhood Initiative, the Women’s Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, the Center for Urban Biblical Ministry and Smith Brothers Agency.

Dr. Terry Mann, project director, explained, “We don’t provide counseling – we provide marriage education classes, such as marriage enrichment, parenting together, fathering, marriage mentoring, marriage sustainers and high school relationship education.” Programs are run as six-week workshops, and some are also intensive weekend models.

Although TWOgether partners with churches, the program is not faith-based. “The leaders follow program guidelines and are facilitators, rather than lecturers,” Mann said. “There is homework and group exercises and lots of interaction.”

Mann sees the Re-Union ceremony as a great opportunity to tell Pittsburgh about TWOgether. A pastor with a Doctor of Ministry degree, Mann will bless Re-Union participants with a few lighthearted words of wisdom about marriage. “The purpose is to be celebratory,” he said. “This is an opportunity for us to support and partner with [the event].”

Each couple has their own reasons for renewing vows. Kari and Adam Maszle were married only a month (November 3, 2007) when they decided to join the fun, although “We dated for a little over twelve years,” said Kari. She even talked her parents into participating.

“We thought it would be neat to take part in setting a world record,” Kari said, “I don’t know how many people can say they married their best friend, but I certainly did.”

The best reason to renew, of course, is what got couples this far in the first place – love. “We’re still never much in love, even after 41 years,” said Geri Green. “Renewing our vows seemed like a fun thing to do.”

Quipped Mike, “I was going for the cake.”

*For more information on Re-Union, visit <http://members.carnegiemuseums.org/vowrenewal>. For information on TWOgether Pittsburgh, visit [www.twogetherpittsburgh.org](http://www.twogetherpittsburgh.org) or call 1-888-WED-4EVR (1-888-9334387).*