

# Turbulent times for travel agents

By **ROBYN TAYLOR**  
The Winchester Star

**WINCHESTER** — Being a travel agent sounds like a dream job. You can visit exotic places, maybe get a bit of special treatment including some free trips.

But since the coronavirus pandemic hit in March, agents have been on the phone around the clock with clients distraught over losing their deposits or with airlines, cruises and resorts trying to get their clients' money back.

"This has not been fun," said Katie Anderson of Frederick County, who had been planning to go on a safari to South Africa. "2020 is not going to go down as a good year."

"I had a wedding [booked] for Mexico in June and all that got canceled," said Anderson, who concentrates on "exotic" travel through her firm Katie Anderson Voyages. "It's really sad because the bride and family had worked hours and hours on this and then the whole thing crashed."

Travelers don't pay for the agent's services. Agents earn their money through commissions paid by resorts and hotels, cruise lines, car rental agencies and airlines. And they don't get paid until travel has been successfully completed.

"This is the first time I've ever seen anything like this," said Mary June Williams, owner of Alpha Voyages Inc. in Winchester, who has been an agent since 1989. "We will not have a flow of cash for a year."



JOHN DETRIXHE/BLOOMBERG

Delicate Arch in Arches National Park is shown near Moab, Utah. The Great American Road Trip to rural area may be an attractive travel option for 2020 and beyond.

Williams said that none of her clients has lost money on a canceled trip. If they don't receive outright refunds, they are getting credits for future travel.

"It may be slow in coming, but it is coming," Williams said of the refunds.

Bookings for next year are starting to pick up, Anderson said. Travel companies are offering "pretty nice incentives" to encourage people to roll over their deposits to another trip, she said. About half of her clients are taking advantage of the sweetened deals.

"It's all about comfort level," said Anderson, who has traveled to 86 countries during her 50-year career as a travel agent.

Although cruise lines won't sail from U.S. ports until September at the earliest, some determined clients keep rescheduling their cruises even as sail

dates are pushed to later in the year. "They're not giving up," Williams said.

Because one thing the coronavirus can't kill is wanderlust.

"I think people in general are hopeful about travel," said Pat Fletcher with Alpha Voyages. "They're waiting for the best time for themselves and their family."

Anderson has clients going to Scandinavia in September.

"They're well traveled," she said. "They feel it will be safe."

Still, domestic travel is one of the best and safest options this year, especially since the European Union probably isn't going to allow Americans to visit when it reopens its borders in July.

Beach and mountain houses are good choices this year — if you can get a reservation. Anderson owns a beach house on the

Outer Banks of North Carolina. She said she started seeing cancellations for the house in March, with six cancellations for June and July. But the house was quickly snapped up by others looking for a relatively safe getaway.

"That's where families are headed," Anderson said of beach vacations. "There's a comfort level. You can stay at the house and not have to be around other people much."

For those looking for something more tropical, another option is the Caribbean islands, which are so dependent on tourist dollars. "All of the islands are slowly reopening but on their own terms," said Beth Drummond, an agent with Alpha Voyages.

Some resorts are surveying guests to find out if they may have been exposed to the virus and taking their temperature. Others are requiring visitors

to quarantine on the resort from anywhere to a couple of days up to two weeks before venturing off the property, Drummond said.

Drummond said that Sandals resorts, all-inclusive resorts for couples in the Caribbean, are stepping up the protocol for cleaning and are not filling all of the rooms.

"Everything is very fluid," Drummond said of openings and protocols.

The cruise industry will probably be the last to rebound, the agents said. There are just too many people living and eating in close quarters on megaships that can hold 5,000 people.

Except for a couple of European river cruises, Anderson said, "I don't have anybody sailing anywhere."

As dark as 2020 has been, travel agents say, there is a bright spot. When people do start to travel again, agents are betting many travelers, experienced or novice, will want someone on their side if plans must be changed.

Agents know the cancellation and refund policies of the various businesses — or they know how to find out.

"You have a relationship with a person," said Williams, who recently opened a new office for Alpha Voyages at 158 Front Royal Pike.

"This has definitely brought the value of a travel agent to the forefront," Drummond added. "Now they know they can go about their life while we sit on hold for eight hours."

# ‘The cream will rise to the top’

## Experienced wedding vendors keep calm, carry on — and find joy in rescheduling

By **ROBYN TAYLOR**  
The Winchester Star

After many weeks of sitting empty, Historic Rosemont Manor in Berryville will host its first wedding next weekend.

“We’re excited to get back in the saddle again,” said William “Biff” Genda, whose property has hosted nearly 500 weddings since he purchased Rosemont in 2009. “This is a tough time for brides and grooms.”

It’s a tough time for wedding vendors, too, as couples have had to push back their wedding dates or downsize their dreams because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The wedding industry — a competitive business with emotional clients and high-stakes outcomes (after all, brides don’t want a coupon for a free cake or bouquet if the first one didn’t turn out OK) — requires the very best each and every

time from vendors.

“A wedding is not something you can re-do,” said Jeff Baker, president for the last 11 years of Shenandoah Wedding Professionals, a nonprofit organization made up of about 30 companies. The membership — which must meet selective criteria to be included in the group — gather regularly to network and discuss industry developments.

Of course, coronavirus cancellations have been a hot topic among the SWP membership.

But, Baker said, vendors with strong reputations should once again find their appointment books full when the pandemic is over.

“I always say the cream will rise to the top,” said Baker, who along with his wife, Amy, has been running Let the Good Times Roll deejay service since 1996 and has provided entertainment

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PHOTO PROVIDED BY HISTORIC ROSEMONT

The interior of the Rosemont Springs barn is decorated for an elegant wedding reception.

# Vendors

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at some 500 weddings.

The Bakers book 50 weddings each year “and the coronavirus has put a big damper on that,” he said. But most of his clients have been re-booking for later in the year or next year. Some are even rescheduling their wedding date around the Bakers’ availability, he said, since they have a reputation for taking care of many details that less experienced deejays may not be aware of.

“We do a lot more than just push play,” Baker said.

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Genda said Rosemont booked 115 weddings for 2020 in either in the main house or in the Rosemont Springs barn, and he expects that 80-90 percent of them will still take place this year since many couples moved their spring wedding dates into the fall. About 70-80 weddings are scheduled to be held in the last half of the year.

The venue will follow all the guidelines issued by the Centers for Disease Control including doing temperature checks on guests, of-

fering plenty of hand sanitizer and requiring masks be worn. Seating will encourage social distancing and the food will be covered by protective shields.

“When it comes to dancing, I don’t know what we’ll do,” Genda said. “Guests may have to just dance with the person they came with. And I don’t know if it’s possible to line dance 6 feet apart.”

Genda said that couples seem to be worried about getting accurate head counts — wondering if they send out 250 invitations will they only get 100 acceptances because people are afraid to attend or to fly.

Genda is advising couples to stay flexible and not be too concerned about shifting health guidelines or elusive head counts.

“We are encouraging couples to move forward with their wedding plans,” he said. “We’re planning to still give all our couples a beautiful experience.”

◆  
Other vendors are opting to sit out the turmoil and hope for better times next year. The Museum of the Shenandoah Valley on Amherst

Street in Winchester is not scheduling any weddings for the remainder of 2020, said the museum’s Deputy Director, Community Relations Julie Armel. The weddings booked for May and June at the MSV were canceled or postponed because the size exceeded Virginia’s guidelines or the museum’s indoor space wasn’t large enough for everyone to socially distance.

Now, however, would be a good time for couples to schedule engagement or bridal photos in the museum’s seven acres of gardens, Armel said.

◆  
If planning a wedding is difficult, scheduling a honeymoon may be even harder.

But there’s no rule the honeymoon must be taken immediately after the wedding, and some local couples are choosing to go ahead with their ceremonies and save the romantic trip until travel is safer, Beth Drummonds, an independent travel advisor working with Alpha Voyages Inc. in Winchester, said in an email.

“Right now most couples who

have summer weddings are trying to stay positive,” wrote Drummonds, who has been meeting with brides and grooms via Zoom or in person to plan their honeymoons.

Couples are planning and booking trips, she said, although the choices of locations are bit less, especially until Europe reopens to travelers from the U.S.

But the Caribbean nations are slowly reopening, said Drummonds, adding that the Caribbean has always been a top destination because of the short travel time, its affordability and the many all-inclusive resorts with amazing benefits. All the resorts are increasing their cleaning and sanitation standards and are following Centers for Disease Control or World Health Organization recommendations for COVID-19, she said.

Some couples would prefer to honeymoon in the United States, she said, but there are only a few true all-inclusive resorts in the country and they’re both in Florida — ClubMed Sandpiper Bay and The Bungalows Key Largo.

As for destination weddings — when the bride and groom as well

as their family and friends travel to a foreign country or island location for the ultimate wedding celebration — well, not surprisingly, they’re not popular right now.

“A few [couples] have had to postpone to next year or change to a local event and then go for a honeymoon or just go with the two of them and return for a celebration with their friends and family after their “weddingmoon,” Drummonds wrote.

Couples who are nervous about booking a honeymoon should consider using a travel agent, who can help navigate this uncertain time and advocate for clients if any changes are required, Drummonds said.

“Why should you have the added stress of planning not only a wedding,” she asked. “But then deal with travel details that are changing daily (or hourly in some cases).”

**To learn more, go to:**

[www.djeffbaker.com](http://www.djeffbaker.com)  
[www.rosemont1811.com](http://www.rosemont1811.com)  
[www.themsv.com](http://www.themsv.com)  
[www.alphavoyagesinc.com](http://www.alphavoyagesinc.com)  
[www.shenandoahwedding.com](http://www.shenandoahwedding.com)

# Fresh off the farm

Consumers can enjoy produce and help farmers through Community Supported Agriculture programs

By **ROBYN TAYLOR**  
The Winchester Star

**WINCHESTER** — Safe at home, sheltering in place during the coronavirus, many of us are in the kitchen trying new recipes or creating old favorites.

And we're thinking a lot more about our food — where and how to get, will it be enough, is it safe and where does it come from?

Those looking for a way to get closer to the producer and help out local farmers, might consider purchasing a share in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.

“You build a personal relationship with the farm producing that food and know that it is fresh, healthy, and locally harvested,” said Levi Snapp, manager of West Oaks Farm Market in Frederick County, with locations on Cedar Creek Grade and Middle Road. “In addition, you get the humbling feeling of knowing you are supporting a local business and local family in your community.”

Plus, it's fun to open the box each week to see what you get.

Here's how a CSA works: Farmers sell shares in their upcoming crops. This gives them the cash to purchase seed and hire workers to plant and care for the crops. As the farmers harvest the produce, they package up the bounty and provide it to the “shareholders” on a regular basis throughout the growing season. In the spring, share boxes could be filled with greens, asparagus and berries. At the height of the season, the boxes may have tomatoes, corn, peppers, zucchini and peaches.

Of course, just like the farmers, shareholders take the risk that the season will be dry or too wet. It may end up a being a poor year for corn and a bumper season for tomatoes.

Sometimes the boxes will be filled with all your favorites, and sometimes you'll discover “new to you” vegetables

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JEFF TAYLOR/THE WINCHESTER STAR



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West Oaks Farm and Market includes a recipe card in each box of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) produce.

West Oaks Farm and Market owner Mary Snapp holds a sample box of produce that subscribers to the farm's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program receive. In the box are cantaloupe, cabbage, new potatoes, yellow squash, zucchini, beets, asparagus, spring onions, green beans and pink lady apples.

# CSA

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or fruits that will send you flipping through cookbooks or searching the internet for recipes.

Mike Smith, owner of Willow Grove Farm on Merrimans Lane, offers familiar vegetables in his CSA but keeps it fresh and fun with different colors.

"You're not going to get kohlrabi, but you'll see purple cabbage," said Smith, who started the farm in 2014 after he graduated from the College of William & Mary.

A share in Willow Grove's CSA costs \$500 for 22 weeks. Pickups are on Sundays beginning on Mother's Day and ending the first Sunday in October. Smith said the weekly boxes will feature four to seven varieties of vegetables each week.

CSAs work best for those who like to cook, enjoy eating all sorts of vegetables, are willing to try new things and don't travel for extended periods in the summer.

This is a great summer to try a CSA, local farmers say.

"Right now, the biggest benefit to joining a CSA is



PROVIDED PHOTO

Mike Smith is the owner of Willow Grove Farm on Merrimans Lane in Frederick County. He offers a 22-week CSA program that begins May 10.

knowing that you will always have food available to you," said Sharon Mauzy who runs Skyview Acres, a 76-acre farm on the banks of Opequon Creek, with her husband Greg.

Skyview Acres is a meat-

only CSA, offering pasture-raised beef, chicken and pork.

When you subscribe to a CSA program, Mauzy said, "you're helping keep your local economy moving forward and you can be assured that very minimal hands have touched your dinner ingredients."



Here is a list of some local CSAs to get you started.

• **A Farm Less Ordinary in Bluemont; contact 202-810-3276 or visit [afarmlessordinary.org](http://afarmlessordinary.org)**

According to its website, a A Farm Less Ordinary offers a CSA of 15 weeks. The boxes will be packed full of five to seven varieties of whatever organic vegetables are being harvested that week — enough for at least a family of four.

A Farm Less Ordinary is a nonprofit that create employment opportunities for adults with disabilities.

• **Chilly Hollow Farm in Berryville; visit [chillyhollowproduce.com](http://chillyhollowproduce.com) or call 610-574-0008**

A chemical-free farm, Chilly Hollow offers a 16-week CSA that begins the third week in May and ends in early September. Pick up is on the farm off Va. 7 on Tuesdays and Fridays.

• **Oak Hart Farm in Berryville; visit [oakhartfarm.com](http://oakhartfarm.com)**

Oak Hart has already sold out of its shares for 2020, according to its website.

• **Shallowbrooke Farm in Boyce. Call 540-247-8358 for details or visit [shallowbrookefarm.com](http://shallowbrookefarm.com).**

The owner is still working out the details for Shallowbrooke's CSA, but the farm is definitely going to have one this year. The season will last 20 weeks and feature fruits, vegetables and meat. Delivery available.

• **Skyview Acres in Frederick County; call 540-247-8585 or visit [skyviewfarming.com](http://skyviewfarming.com)**

Skyview Acres off Senseny Road in Frederick County offers a meat-only CSA in two seasons — May until October and then from late November until April. Shares are offered in all beef, beef/chicken

combo or pork. In addition, CSA members can add on free-range chicken eggs, additional ground beef, Spice of the Month Club and non-GMO quail eggs.

• **West Oaks Farm Market in Frederick County; call 540-539-8175 or [wofmarket@gmail.com](mailto:wofmarket@gmail.com)**

West Oaks offers shares, half shares and quarter shares for its CSA that features fruits and vegetables. This is the fifth year that West Oaks will offer a CSA. The season begins around May 15 and will run until mid-October. Pickup on Wednesday or Friday. A full share is \$28 a week for a minimum of 20 weeks. Deadline to sign up is May 1.

• **Willow Grove Farm in Winchester; call 540-336-9412 or visit [willowgrovefarmcsa.com](http://willowgrovefarmcsa.com)**

Willow Grove Farm is on Merrimans Lane just outside the Winchester city limits. The produce, mostly vegetables, is grown without chemicals and fed organic raw earth minerals and plant extracts to create a nutritionally dense product.