

# SAN DIEGO DOWNTOWN NEWS

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## Couple wins ultimate wedding

By **KAI OLIVER-KURTIN** | DOWNTOWN NEWS

A recent contest encouraging soon-to-be brides and grooms to explain why they should win an Ultimate San Diego Wedding has sent one lucky couple to the altar. Golden Hill residents Rachel Stewart and Matthew O'Donovan were chosen by a public vote to receive a gratis wedding with an estimated value of \$60,000.

The couple was married at the historic downtown El Cortez Hotel on Jan. 19 (Stewart's birthday), and benefited from more than 20 wedding industry vendors who donated their time, knowledge, lavish products and services including cater-

ing, wedding cake, photography, videography, wedding attire, invitations, flowers, music, venue and event coordination.

The contest was sponsored by Bridal Insider (bridalinsider.com), a website for planning San Diego weddings and also an informative social network for local brides, grooms and wedding vendors. Bridal Insider also opened a physical location at 305 Laurel St.

"Anyone would be jealous of their incredible wedding," said Rachel Welland, wedding coordinator and owner of Bliss Events.

"I was blown away by the generosity and creativity of all the vendors," said

SEE WEDDING, Page 4



Golden Hill residents Rachel Stewart and Matthew O'Donovan won the Ultimate San Diego Wedding contest and were married at the El Cortez Hotel on Jan. 19.

Photo by Carrie McCluskey Photography

## WEDDING

CONTINUED FROM Page 1

Welland. "Everyone went above and beyond to give Matt and Rachel an incredible wedding and really enjoyed the opportunity to showcase their products without any restriction."

More than 200 couples entered the contest for a chance at winning their dream wedding, billed to be a golden winter romance — without having to foot the expenses.

"The entries were narrowed down to about 50 couples who were qualified to enter the contest according to the official rules," said Welland. "Next, a judging panel comprised of nine wedding industry professionals ranked the top contestants. We were unanimous in our decision."

The top three contestants then campaigned for the public's votes through TV and radio appearances during the weeklong voting period.

"Our story was different," said O'Donovan. "We haven't suffered any personal tragedy — we're just regular people with young kids who want a good family structure. We're just two all-American kids trying to do the right thing."

"I don't have an emotion-filled, heartbreaking story — just love," O'Donovan wrote in his contest

entry. As a groom-to-be, O'Donovan stood out among all the entries, which were from brides-to-be.

"This would mean the world to her. What a wonderful birthday gift this would be!" he wrote.

Stewart and O'Donovan, both state of California employees, met three years ago and have been adversely affected by salary reductions, mandatory furloughs and the rising cost of daycare.

"Matt and Rachel had a compelling story that people could relate to," said Welland. "The cost of two kids made them prioritize and put their wedding on the backburner. Since they put their kids before a grand wedding, I think the public wanted to treat them."

The couple had planned to marry at the local courthouse a week prior to their ceremony. "It wouldn't have been nearly as extravagant," said O'Donovan. "We are so grateful for the whole experience ... everyone made us feel like such royalty."

Using money they would have spent on a wedding reception to celebrate with friends and family, the newlyweds were able to enjoy a honeymoon on Maui instead.

"This is definitely a blessing," said O'Donovan. "We feel like somebody's looking after us."

For more information on the Ultimate San Diego Wedding or to read contestant entries, visit [ultimatesandiegowedding.com](http://ultimatesandiegowedding.com).