

Hidden Gem Prospering in Rural Alabama

By Shelby Ray Gandy

BELMONT, ALABAMA— The gentle chirping of birds and quacking of ducks whispers through the wind as the leaves rustle in the trees. You feel the warmth of the sun on your skin as it peeks through the clouds. Sitting on a pier, you watch as a barge smoothly passes through the gleaming waters of the Tombigbee River, leaving small waves in its wake that lap against the chalk bluffs. You are on the property of Mimosa Ridge in Sumter County, Alabama.

Nearly 20 years ago, Bruce Marchand began construction of two cabins in his hometown of Belmont, Alabama, establishing Mimosa Ridge. Almost two decades later, Mimosa Ridge is a full-service wedding chapel with six rental cabins.

"In the first year of business, I only needed two cabins. That was all the business I had," said Marchand.

"About every year and a half, I would build another cabin as business grew. I finished the fifth cabin the same year I finished constructing the chapel. We added a sixth cabin last year, and now we are building a seventh cabin because we need more cabins," Marchand said with a laugh.

Throughout the years, the cabins at Mimosa Ridge have become more popular. Many guests come back each year to enjoy the picturesque, riverfront views. From simple, weekend getaways to hunting trips and church retreats, the cabins at Mimosa Ridge are for anyone wanting to immerse themselves in the beauty of nature. In addition, most couples book all cabins for their wedding weekend at the chapel.

"As a full-service wedding venue, we provide tables, chairs, flowers, food, drinks, cakes, music and on-site lodging for family, friends and members of the bridal party. We also do rehearsal dinners, and all set up and clean up. I am even licensed as a marriage officiant, should any couple need one. Each year, I usually officiate about half of our weddings," said Marchand.

The inside of the chapel at Mimosa Ridge can fit up to 160 guests. The chapel also has separate dressing rooms for the bride and groom. Outside, there is a covered reception area with a custom gazebo that overlooks the Tombigbee River.

"There are multiple ceremony locations on the property to allow each bride to find their perfect setting. We also have a professional staff that will take care of every detail of preparation and implementation," said Marchand.

Hallie Neal, a May 2019 bride, said, "I was able to choose exactly what I wanted, and everything turned out even better than I could have imagined. It poured down rain on the day of our wedding, and the staff never missed a beat. I highly recommend Mimosa Ridge to anyone who is looking for a beautiful, romantic place to hold their perfect day."

When COVID-19 emerged in March 2020, many couples cancelled or rescheduled their wedding for later in the year, and Mimosa Ridge was quiet for the following two months.

"After things were shut down in March, we opened back up in June and ended up doing 20 weddings for the remainder of the year. With that, we had close to three thousand people here. None of our staff got COVID-19, and we were never contacted about anyone who got COVID-19 that was traced back to one of our events, so I'd say we did pretty well," said Marchand.

Since reopening in June 2020, Mimosa Ridge continues to follow COVID-19 precautions during all events.

"We space more for our seating. We put out more tables for dining so that people are more spaced out. We no longer allow buffet-style dining. The staff serves food and drinks while wearing masks and gloves. We periodically clean door handles in the chapel during events and provide hand sanitizer and masks," Marchand said.

Despite the emergence of COVID-19, Mimosa Ridge continues to adapt and thrive in the rural town of Belmont, Alabama.

"I grew up in Belmont, so this was home," said Marchand. "I had this property and I wanted to do something with it."