

Phoenix Couples

Written by Story by Caroline Austerman, Melissa Larsen and Christine Whitton /
Photographed by Cassandra Tomei

It's Valentines Day this month and love is in the air, so *AFM* asked five local couples about how their romance began and what continues to make their relationship special.

Christopher Gross & Jamie Hormel

Dating since: April 9, 2007



Christopher Gross, the award-winning chef behind Christopher's Restaurant and Crush Lounge in Phoenix, and Jamie Hormel, owner of Phoenix's historic Wrigley Mansion, are a match made in foodie heaven.

Acquaintances since 1992, chef Gross and Hormel met at various charitable events, but didn't start dating until 2007—a courtship to whom they credit their mutual friend, Carla Goodyear. Thanks to Goodyear's introduction (and several girls' nights out at Christopher's Restaurant), Gross, at last, asked Hormel to dinner at Asia de Cuba. "I was very nervous when he asked me out," she says. "I wasn't sure if it was a date, or if I was supposed to pay for myself."

That initial date flourished into a two-an-a-half year relationship and a home that Gross and Hormel share with her three children from a previous marriage, six dogs and Spammy, the potbelly pig. As restaurateurs, their work often requires long, late hours, but at the end of every evening, they make it a point to reconnect over a glass of fine wine and a good movie.—C.W.

Eric & Glynis Legrand

Married: Dec. 10, 1998



It was hardly love at first sight for Eric and Glynis Legrand, owners of Downtown Chandler's Urban Tea Loft. The couple first met in 1991, when they worked together at an insurance company in Virginia. "She was looking at me like I was the strangest person," Eric recalls. Glynis concurs, referring to the red cardigan, glasses and tie that Eric would sport daily: "He looked like a nerd."

Though the Legrands took some time to click, they were married seven years later. Or as Eric puts it: "The love factor took over." After getting engaged outside the south lawn of the White House, the couple started planning their wedding for March 1999. When Eric and Glynis realized they could marry as soon as they obtained their marriage certificate, they excitedly made a wedding appointment at the courthouse that very day—three months before their intended wedding day.

About four years after exchanging vows, the couple's devotion to one another was tried when the now-healthy Glynis was diagnosed with breast cancer. "You're tested sometimes on how far you'd go for people, how much you love people," Eric says. "Back then, I realized that I'm willing to go the distance for this person. I love this person so much that I was willing to switch places with her." The Legrands' love has only flourished since then.

Today, the couple adores spending time with their 10-year-old daughter, Zhayer. And though, as business owners their days are packed, they do their best to squeeze in a date-night movie.—M.L.

Dan & Paige Wheeler

Married: July 4, 1998

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Dan and Paige Wheeler met at a Valley gym in 1993, where he was a personal trainer and she was the general manager. Though they started as co-workers, only time would tell that they were meant to be much more.

Dan, now the CEO of HR Betty, believes the key to their relationship is the fact that they began as best friends. "As our relationship started to progress, Paige had said 'There's no way we can work together and have a relationship.' So, I said 'Fine, I quit.'" After leaving his job at the gym, they continued dating and, eventually, married.

Paige purposely planned the wedding on July 4 so that their anniversary would always be memorable: "If we see fireworks in the sky and don't remember, then there is a real problem," she says. "My husband always says that it signifies the loss of our independence, so it's kind of an anti-Fourth of July."

With 11 years of marriage under their belts, the Wheeler's children are the most important part of their lives. They enjoy spending time with their daughter, Ashten, 9, and son, Scott, 7, as much as possible. For example, Dan is heavily involved with coaching his kids' sports teams. What's the Wheelers' secret to staying on course as a family? "We just live life as it comes at us and do what we want to do and just make sure that we're constantly helping others and looking out for the kids," Dan says.—C.A.

Robert Black & Marc Reid

Anniversary: Nov. 7, 1995



Marc Reid and Robert Black were brought together by fate and a four-legged friend. Black first met Reid when he hired him as a model at the time he opened the Robert Black Agency (which became FORD/Robert Black in 1994). "The funny story was that I was actually hiring Marc's Dalmatian for a job," Black says. "They were looking for a Dalmatian for one of the shoots, so they put him and the Dalmatian in the shoot." Though love didn't spark at their first encounter, Reid and Black later re-met at a party 14 years ago, and have been together ever since.

The couple is very busy these days. In addition to the agency, Black recently opened a boutique in Old Town called Fashion by Robert Black, which specializes in vintage designer women's clothes. Not far from Fashion by Robert Black, Reid is a stylist at Steven Paul Salon, a full-service salon, boutique and cafe. Even with their hectic schedules, the couple maintains their successful relationship with balance, communication and freedom. And, they both enjoy spending time with their six-year-old son and three dogs.

Despite being local business owners, Reid and Black see themselves eventually moving away from the Valley and more towards the sea. "My goal is to live on the water," Reid says. "I think that is one of our mutual goals."—C.A.

Mark & Chrissy Donnelly

Married: September 10, 1995



Though they were former schoolmates in Portland, Ore., Mark and Chrissy Donnelly didn't make a love connection until several years after graduating. They knew the moment they locked eyes at an athletic club that it was love—so much so, they married one year later.

While honeymooning in Hawaii, the Donnellys decided on a career change that would afford them more time together; a move that meant leaving their high-powered positions (his as the 11-year vice president of marketing for Contact Industries, his Oregon-based family-owned and -operated company; hers as a CPA for Price Waterhouse). After brainstorming multiple ideas, Chrissy, still in honeymoon mode, suggested

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compiling a book based on real-life romances. "Wouldn't it be fun if there was a collection of short stories that was uplifting, inspirational and gave some take-away value," she says.

Over the next several years, the Donnellys worked side-by-side coauthoring 10 "Chicken Soup for the Soul" books, including their own passage, "Fifty Ways to Love Your Partner," for "Chicken Soup for the Couple's Soul." The Donnellys also work side-by-side, as they formed the Donnelly Marketing Group. They say being each other's best friend—in and out of office—has been the key to their personal and professional success.—C.W.