

## 70 say 'I do' on day for love

By [Rita Farlow](#), Times Staff Writer

Published Sunday, February 14, 2010

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LARGO — The brides came in red satin gowns and simple sundresses, with miniature roses tucked into upswept hair.

The grooms wore three-piece suits or Hawaiian shirts and jeans.

Thirty-five couples stood together on a cool, sunny Valentine's Day and took their marriage vows in front of a white gazebo and a quote etched into stone: "Love is the flower of life."

The fourth annual group wedding ceremony held Sunday at the Florida Botanical Gardens in Largo was officiated by Ken Burke, Pinellas County's clerk of the circuit court.

Burke reminded those about to be betrothed to treat one another with "gentleness and kindness."

He read a tender love poem, then another selection picked out by his wife:

"To keep your marriage brimming, with love in the loving cup, whenever you're wrong, admit it; whenever you're right, shut up."

The group was serenaded with *I Love You Truly* by the Charmonizers, a Clearwater barbershop quartet, before the "I do's."

The couple's stories were as varied as their wedding attire.

One couple said they fell in love after meeting at a heavy-metal Ozzfest in Massachusetts three years ago. Another flew in from Ohio just for the ceremony. A couple in their mid 30s grew up together in Russia and reconnected when the groom flew home for a visit about a year ago.

Some were on their first marriages, others their third.

Ed Holdgate III and his bride, Mary, were among the latter. The two met after Mary's second husband died in 2002.

Ed Holdgate, 76, dressed in a suit with a top hat and cane, and quipped that they had to get married "for the baby."

"We complement each other," said Mary Holdgate, 59. "He tells the jokes, I laugh."

David and Shamika Harvey had a special guest at their wedding: a baby girl due next month.

The Tampa couple met on a church mission trip to the West Indies a decade ago and have another daughter together.

After exchanging rings and sharing their first kiss as husband and wife, 30-year-old David Harvey beamed.

"You're my wife, now. We did it. Thank you, Jesus."

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