

EVENT
SHOWCASE

Winter Wonderland

Transforming a
barn in Louisiana

By Connie Lannan

How do you turn a 60-ft.-by-100-ft. barn in Louisiana into a winter wonderland for a wedding reception? Ask Ron Dufour, owner and event specialist at Spot Lighting Audio Video Productions in Ponchatoula, La., whose background is in sound, lighting and event production.

“The bride had been to Branson, Stone Mountain and Dollywood. She wanted the barn to look like that for her wedding in February 2023,” he says. “I had a month-and-a-half to plan this. I was determined to make this look perfect,” he says.

He spent two days in the barn, sketching out the plan. The overall strategy was to have the main barn be used for appetizers, dancing and the primary reception area for the 500 guests. Eating was to take place outside in six high-peak tents, which he would install and connect to the barn.

On his first day in the barn, he saw a challenge: not enough power.

“There was a little panel on the side — a couple of circuits. That wasn’t going to be enough power,” he says, since he was planning to run a lot of lights.

“We had to figure out how much power we needed. There was a main part of the barn and then another 15 ft. to 20 ft. on each side. The beams that were crossing to the main beams going up and down had no power for the lit trees we were planning. We couldn’t run all this power across the floor as there would have been 14 to 16 lines crossing just for that. We had to go across the



beams to get the power for that,” he says.

The lit tree concept was inspired by the famous Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans. “It has a big light display every year and all those trees that are angled. The bride liked that idea,” he says.

The question was how could he do it? “The grandma said, ‘We have a lot of property. Why don’t you just chop down some trees?’ We ended up going into the swamps. With a chain saw we cut branches,” Dufour says.

While the trees he found did have a curve, it wasn't what he wanted. "We took a dance floor cart and leaned them on that. The rainwater bent them over. We painted them, using so many cans of spray paint. Then we put the Christmas lights on each branch, zip-tying them and then transporting them to the barn," he says.

In addition to the trees and all the lighting, major draping of the barn was required.

"We had never done that much draping before. The ceilings were really high. We had to rent a scissor lift to get the drape up that high. A couple of friends, my wife and I, and my daughter, who is a seamstress and costume designer, draped all the walls and ceiling. It took one day to do all the drapes on the ceiling. We used polyester drape, which is heavier, because we didn't want people to see it was a barn and we wanted the lights to leave the right shadows on the drapes. It took us another day to do all the lighting on the ceiling. It was all very intricate," he says.

Then, the night before the wedding, a tornado went through possibly within just a few miles from the barn and tents. Dufour was grateful it didn't come any closer.

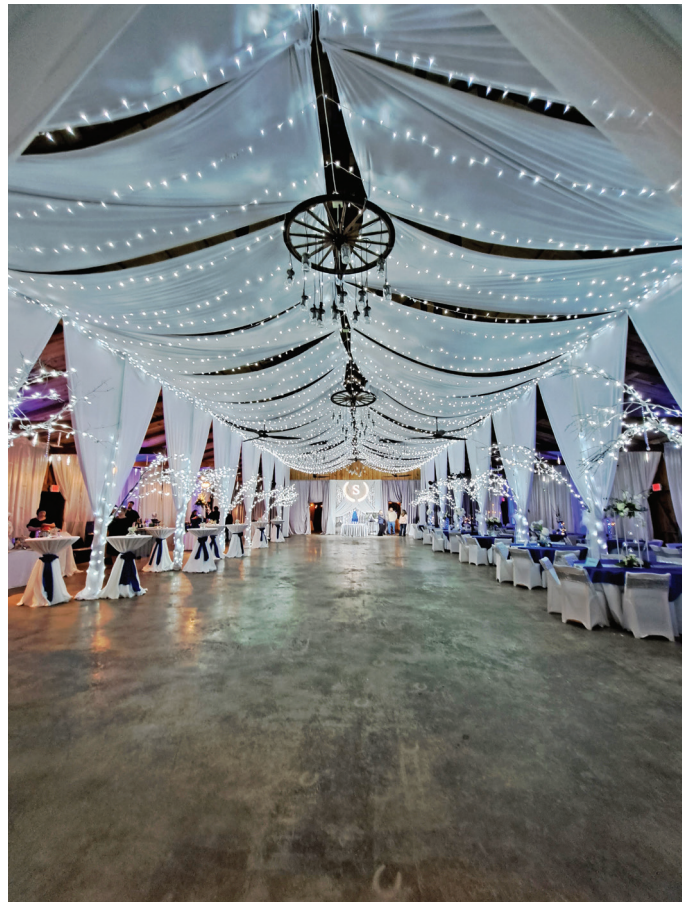
If that wasn't enough, the day of the wedding, Dufour experienced a deep personal loss. His stepmother passed away. "I was able to say my goodbyes via a phone call. Then I had to get back to the job," he says.

Despite all these challenges, the event went off without a hitch. The drapes flowed, the hundreds of feet of Christmas lights hung from the ceiling and the hundreds of feet of icicle lighting around the perimeter beams "made it look like snow was falling," he says.

"We projected a custom monogram that we designed. We had blue uplighting around some of the perimeter of the barn. Lighting for the food areas was hung and aimed down (in the barn). Intelligent moving lights were programmed to spotlight the bride and groom for their first dance and project snow patterns moving around the room, and the lights provided dance floor lighting at the touch of a button. We installed bistro lighting in the food tents, lit the pathways and lit up the carriage they left in like in 'Cinderella,'" Dufour says.

Because the bride wanted a lot of snow in the pictures, Dufour brought in snow machines. "I put them on truss towers so they were high and put white spandex around them to make them look white. I also had white light that would come on via a lighting board so when the bride and groom walked through, we would push a fader up and everything would come on. I remember that as the couple was coming to the end of the tent, before I hit the fader, the snow machines went on just as they crossed to outside. I didn't even touch it. It was like my stepmom was there saying, 'I got you,'" he says.

Everyone loved how everything looked. It also was a hit with voters of the Event Showcase — a photo contest held on The ARA Show™ Facebook and Instagram pages. It garnered a spot as one of the winners. The prize was having the event photo displayed during EventsU and the show in February 2024 in New Orleans, and Spot Lighting Audio Video Productions receiving a free Certified Event Rental Professional (CERP) program enrollment. ♦



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