

# Nurses plan dream wedding

By **Selicia Kennedy-Ross**  
Staff Writer

SAN BERNARDINO — Nurses generally are considered angels of mercy. For Carla Colunga, the nurses who work on the fifth floor of St. Bernardine Medical Center are more like angels of love.

Like most women, Colunga, 48, dreamed of her wedding day. On May 11, the nurses at St. Bernardine helped make Colunga's dream come true.

"They're like my second family," the Colton woman said.

Diagnosed with leukemia last year, Colunga has been a patient on the fifth-floor oncology ward, on and off, since March 2006. She stayed there so often, usually between four to six weeks at a time, that she grew close to the nurses.

"They're all really good," Colunga said. "The RNs, the nurse's aides, they go above and beyond."

The staff really connected with her, said Jackie Kimball, a registered nurse at St. Bernardine.

Carla and her then-fiancé, 57-year-old Ruben Colunga, met 13 years ago on a blind date. They had been living together for the past three years when Ruben popped the question in early May.

"We've had our ups and downs and been living together  
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Courtesy Photo

Carla marries Ruben Colunga in the Healing and Meditation Garden at St. Bernardine Medical Center on May 11.

## WEDDING

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for almost three years," Carla said. "He called me in my hospital room and he asked me, he said, 'Will you marry me?' He told me it was time for him to settle down.

"He'd asked before but I always thought he'd change his mind in the morning," she added with a laugh.

Ruben Colunga was eager to get the wedding under way and wanted to have the ceremony that week.

"He was like, 'Let's do this by Friday,' and I said, 'But this is Tuesday!'" Carla said.

The couple discussed their wedding plans, which they knew would have to take place on the hospital grounds. They even talked about having the ceremony in the hospital room because the hospital chapel had flood damage.

"I didn't want to get married in the room in my hospital gown," Carla said.

Then someone suggested the Healing and Meditation Garden, which easily can be seen from Carla's room in 5 Tower, the oncology ward.

The couple loved the idea.

That's when the oncology nurses, who were so happy for the couple, took charge. They began planning a wedding for Carla in the healing garden.

Kimball pitched the idea to the administration, who agreed to let the wedding take place.

"She has a very serious diagnosis and she wanted to marry her long-time sweetie and it just sort of evolved from there," Kimball said. "All the nurses on that floor pitched in. We wanted her to have a pleasant day. It was a beautiful thing."

Many of the nurses from both the day and night shifts came in on their day off to attend the wedding. Carla's 19-year-old daughter, Josephine, was the maid of honor.

A harpist offered to play music for the ceremony.

The nurses supplied the minister — the husband of nurse Anne Mitchell.

"All of the staff on the fifth floor was pulling for her to feel well on that day," Kimball said.

Carla did start the day feeling well. She donned the white dress her sister-in-law picked out for her. Instead of the traditional veil, she wore a 1920s-style white headband.

"My daughter wanted to get me a veil, but all the ones they had were clips and I don't have any hair," Carla said.

But the light mood changed as Carla began to feel weak.

"I was feeling really good until I was getting dressed," she said. "Then I started feeling sick."

Carrying a colorful spring bouquet, Carla walked through the healing garden in front of St. Bernadine and toward the man she loved.

With more than 20 guests, including nurses and family, looking on, Carla wed Ruben Colunga. At times during the ceremony she was so weak that he supported her with his arms.

"Some nurses that couldn't come down were looking out the window. Even the ICU nurses were looking out the windows," Carla said.

"I'm 48 and I was getting married for the first time and it was even better than I imagined," she said.

The nurses also threw a reception for the newlyweds. Someone brought a cake. Someone else brought a bottle of champagne and sodas. Others decorated the fifth-floor conference room with streamers, white paper wedding bells and a banner that read: "Congratulations Carla and Ruben."

"I had a little sip of champagne and we ate cake," Carla said.

She even threw her bouquet.

"I really appreciate them all. They've gone out of their way to make us feel like part of their family," Ruben Colunga said.

After a brief release from the hospital after her May wedding, Carla was re-admitted on Thursday. She is awaiting a bone marrow transplant and will likely undergo another round of chemotherapy.

"Once I get my transplant, we'll have a big pool party. Everyone will go swimming," she said.

To the nurses, Carla had this to say, "We love them all."

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