

SMALL-BUSINESS PROFILE

# Marriage commissioner offers wedding alternative

BY CATHY WELCH  
Special to the Daily Press

NEWPORT NEWS — Mike Guzma, owner of The Civil Servant, retired from the city of Trenton, N.J., as chief real estate officer. He followed his son to Newport News to be “Grandpop” to his first grandson.

“I’m in my third retirement,” Guzma says.

Formerly a code enforcement officer, real estate broker, appraiser and city planner, Guzma and his family turned to property restoration, taking century-old farmhouses and creating equestrian estates. Married for more than 49 years to Joan, a talented floral designer, he says, “She really brought culture into my life.”

Guzma sits as a commissioner for the Newport News Redevelopment and Housing Authority. He is also a licensed marriage commissioner in Newport News, an alternative to a justice of the peace.

Born during the Great Depression, Guzma grew up in a neighborhood where everyone cared for each other. “I can remember my mother feeding people out the back door,” Guzma said.

“She always said, ‘If there’s room in your heart, there’s room in your home.’ We’ve always been a giving family.”

The Civil Servant opened in September. Recently married couples told him horror stories of ceremonies on front porches and in front of desks in disheveled offices. These stories stirred a passion in his heart, Guzma said. “We bring something better.”

“When you get married, you remember every moment of that day,” he says. “We want to give these young people something to remember and enjoy.”

“Most of these young people are military. They’re away from home and don’t know anybody,” Guzma says. The Civil Servant gives a 20 percent discount to military in appreciation for their service to our country, he said.

The company performs ceremonies in a formal parlor com-



PHOTOS BY CATHY WELCH/SPECIAL TO THE DAILY PRESS

Mike Guzma, owner of The Civil Servant, gets ready to perform a marriage ceremony.



Guzma is a licensed marriage commissioner.

plete with Renoir reproductions.

“I have the couple come in days ahead so we can craft what they want for their day. We don’t wing it. That comes from my planning days,” says Guzma.

He also goes offsite for ceremonies.

“We go to the beachfront, to marinas, and other sites.”

In October a sergeant stationed at Langley Air Force Base married her fiancé at noon. He flew in from Georgia at 10:30 a.m.

“They were so in love and so happy,” Guzma says. The couple was not interested in lunch referrals. The groom had to catch a plane to Afghanistan at 4:30 p.m.

Guzma’s city planning and urban renewal mindset is still at

## Company details

### THE CIVIL SERVANT

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**Cost:** The basic ceremony starts at \$50.

**Fun fact:** Military personnel get a 20 percent discount on fees.

the forefront. “I refer people to restaurants down the street and around the corner and to the bakery across the street.”

Tim and Janet Jacobson were married by The Civil Servant in September. “It was very nice of you to send us (our) picture and give us a wonderful memory,” the couple told Guzma.

Guzma praises Newport News. “It’s a great city to start a business. Rex Davis, the clerk of the circuit court, and his staff are professional, well-informed and helpful,” he says.

“I used to do matrimonial appraisals in New Jersey,” Guzma says. “That’s when a couple is getting a divorce and dividing up their property. It’s good to be on this side of the process.”