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Clinton wedding fever excites rural NY village

By MICHELLE NICHOLS, REUTERS

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In this 2009 file photo, Chelsea Clinton and Marc Mezvinsky attend the Clinton Global Initiative closing session, held at the Sheraton Hotel in New York City. (A. Miller/WENN.com)

RHINEBECK, N.Y. - Bill and Hillary Clinton's daughter will be married on Saturday in Rhinebeck, and the picturesque New York village is basking in the glory of hosting what many have dubbed America's royal wedding.

Signs and pictures congratulating Chelsea Clinton, the only child of the former U.S. president and the U.S. secretary of state, and groom Marc Mezvinsky hang in many shop windows, and the high-profile nuptials have the rural town talking.

While wedding plans have remained top secret, the presence of U.S. Secret Service agents in Rhinebeck, 100 miles north of New York City, point to the ceremony being held at Astor Courts, an historic 50-acre estate on the Hudson River.

"It's all everyone's talking about," said Cassidy Reed, 20, an assistant at a local hair salon. "We haven't had one client in here who hasn't said something about it."

Wedding balloons blew in the breeze outside The Rug Garden, a dress shop mannequin wore a wedding gown and an equestrian store offered advice with a sign: "No nagging the groom."

"To welcome Chelsea and Marc and all their friends we're having champagne and cake," said Deborah Belding, 56, owner of The Rug Garden. "It's an honor that a former first daughter is coming to our town and getting married."

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said her daughter had sworn her to secrecy and the wedding plans have withstood leaks better than many Washington secrets. Local media has speculated that the rehearsal dinner will be held in a stone barn on nearby Grasmere estate and that the bride will wear a wedding gown designed by Oscar de la Renta.

The guest list is reported to be around 400 and rumored to include several Washington and Hollywood heavyweights. While President Barack Obama was said to be invited, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said he was unaware of any plans by the president and first lady Michelle Obama to attend.

For disappointed Clinton donors who didn't make the cut, the family made clear only people with a personal connection to the bride and groom were invited. "We love you all but this is her wedding," Hillary Clinton said in a NBC News interview.

'AN AMAZINGLY LUXURIOUS WEDDING'

Claudia Hanlin of New York wedding planning firm The Wedding Library, estimated the celebration's cost at about \$2 million. "It's going to be an amazingly luxurious wedding," she said. "The country is looking to this as its royal wedding."

Chelsea Clinton, 30, and Mezvinsky, 32, have known each other since they were teenagers. He is an investment banker whose parents Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky and Edward Mezvinsky were once Democratic U.S. House of Representatives members.

Chelsea Clinton, who worked at a New York hedge fund and has been studying health policy at Columbia University, has kept a low profile since her father left the White House in January 2001 although she campaigned for her mother during her failed run for the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination.

"Celebrities are our royal family," said Elayne Rapping, a professor of pop culture at the State University of New York at Buffalo. "The Clintons are celebrities in their own right and they are in a sense a royal family ... people are very curious."

Mayor Jim Reardon said the village was given no official notice and he was concerned about traffic and security. He said the Secret Service only told local police about road closures.

But for the village of about 3,500 people that relies heavily on tourism, the wedding brings an economic boost.

"Madison Avenue (advertising agencies) charges millions of dollars for the kind of exposure that we have been getting for free," he said. "We realize it's good for the community."

A painting of a wedding cake with the words "Congratulations Chelsea and Marc" sold to a mysterious buyer after just one day in the window of gift shop Wing and Clover. "(The buyer) is somebody I can't talk about," said manager Yvette Rogers, 33. "Most people are excited for the couple and want to give them their privacy."

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