Photo by Sam Arendt **Love of motorcycles brought Karen Walsh and Ron Roethel together, and when their love bloomed, motorcycles were the theme and transportation for their wedding**

Harley-Davidson motorcycles are what brought Karen Walsh of Port Washington and Ron Roethel of Sheboygan together.

So it was only natural that their favorite mode of transportation be part of their wedding last summer at Parkwood Lodge in Fish Creek.

On July 17, the bride, groom, minister, best man and matron of honor rode their Harleys down a tree-lined “aisle,” then walked on a white runner to a gazebo, where the couple exchanged vows and rings.

The bride wore a white, laced-trimmed gown with a split skirt and a train-length veil she held in her lap as she drove her white 2005 Harley Heritage.

The groom donned a tuxedo T-shirt, white tails and black pants and drove a red and black 2010

Harley Ultra Classic.

Liturgical music played as the wedding party drove up on their bikes.

But when it was time for the bride to appear, Steppenwolf's song "Born To Be Wild" from the movie "Easy Rider" began to play.

"You could hear people laughing as it changed from organ music to 'Get your motor running' as I rode up," Karen said. "That's just what I wanted. I wanted it be fun."

The Rev. Gregory Whelton, who rode his Harley from Sheboygan, performed the ceremony.

Instead of a unity candle, the couple combined two colors of sand — black and white because Karen couldn't find orange sand — into a vase to signify the merger of two people, two families, into one.

This is the second marriage for both. Karen's first husband Jim Walsh died of a heart attack on Dec. 11, 2007. Ron's first wife died of a brain aneurysm in 2002. Her name was also Karen.

After the 4:30 p.m. ceremony, their guests — 53 members of the Suburban Thiensville Harley Owners Group — grilled brats and hamburgers, then gathered their bikes around the couple for a HOG wedding shot.

The couple rode off in the sunset on Ron's Harley to have photographs taken along the Lake Michigan shore.

"We were waving to everybody as we drove through Fish Creek," Karen said.

When they returned to the lodge, friends were playing volleyball in a swimming pool.

The newlyweds held hands as they jumped into the pool still wearing their wedding attire.

"We took the plunge," Ron couldn't resist saying.

“It was a perfect wedding and meant so much to us and our friends,” Karen said. “We wanted to have this special memory.”

The couple had a more traditional ceremony with their families and friends on July 25 at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Saukville.

Karen’s oldest grandson Zachary Beck, 15, walked her down the aisle. Her daughter Kelly Beck was the matron of honor, and her children Jacob, 13, and Karley, 9, were the ring bearer and flower girl.

Her daughter and son-law Kimberly and Allen Dobberfuhl and their children Jonathan, 14, Rebecca, 11, and Benjamin, 6, helped with preparations.

Almost 150 guests attended a picnic reception at Karen’s home, where the couple live.

“We just had a bunch of fun planning both weddings,” Karen said. “I think I was more nervous for the second one because it was in a church, and my family and everyone I knew was there.”

For their honeymoon, the couple jumped on their motorcycles, with “Just Married” signs on their saddlebags, and rode to Sturgis, S.D., for an annual HOG rally.

Almost every vacation includes a Harley rally.

Karen, who had ridden mopeds, learned to handle a Harley in 2002 when she and her first husband bought bikes for Harley-Davidson’s 100th anniversary in 2003. Karen bought a new Harley in 2005. Three months before he died, Jim bought a new
Harley that he only rode a few times. His brother-in-law now owns it.

Ron has owned Harley-Davidsons for many years.

Although both were members of the Thiensville HOG chapter, they didn’t meet until after Karen was widowed.

“I stayed away from chapter meetings for a while because I couldn’t face people,” Karen said.

When she finally attended a meeting, Ron was one of many who expressed their condolences.

“He said, ‘I know how you feel because I lost my wife suddenly six years ago,’” Karen said. “The next month, we talked again, and he asked if I wanted to go for a ride. He sort of stepped in to be my riding partner for the summer.

“He helped me so much going through my grief and getting back into life because he had been through it himself.”

That summer, the HOG group met monthly for Sunday breakfast and a 75 to 80-mile ride. Ron and Karen drove their own Harleys.

One Sunday, it rained so Karen suggested Ron come to her house for a movie and pizza.

“While we were sitting on the couch, he put his arm around me and my feelings went ‘Poof.’ The feeling was so strong between us,” Karen said.

Their friendship rides turned into dates.

“She was so easy to talk to and be around,” Ron said. “It wasn’t difficult to get to know her.”

Friends started telling them how happy they looked together.

“I got a card from a friend who wrote, ‘Dear Karen, we didn’t realize how sad you were until we saw how happy you are. It’s so good to see that bright ear-to-ear smile again,’” Karen said. “That note meant so much to us, we still have it. The same thing happened when I would meet someone from Ron’s life.

“Those comments made us both realize that we had something very special together, and that others could see it, too.”

Her family also liked Ron.

The next summer, Karen and Ron rode their bikes to the annual Thiensville HOG chapter’s Door County outing.

It was Karen’s 65th birthday, so everyone sang “Happy Birthday.”

Ron, 60, then stood up, gave a little speech and asked, “Will you marry me?”

Her answer was “Yes,” and their friends cheered.

Karen and Ron decided to get married in Door County when they received the announcement for the 2010 HOG outing and a link to the Parkwood Lodge.

When Karen saw the lodge’s balcony and staircase, she knew that was where she wanted to be married. When she learned about the gazebo, all doubts vanished.

The plans just evolved, she said, with members of the group offering to take care of the music, flowers and photographs. One guy loaned Jim a white tuxedo jacket with tails to go with the T-shirt for his “formal” wedding attire.

Karen’s split-skirt bridal gown was a dress she bought 20 years ago when the style was popular.

The dress was a bit tattered after its dunk in the pool, so Karen found another bridal gown at a resale shop for the church ceremony.

Her long veil came from a Goodwill store. The white runner they bought for $1 at a rummage sale.

The couple's more traditional church wedding also had a touch of whimsy. The guys wore tuxedo T-shirts and Ron borrowed the tails again.