

Grant McNamara offers customized styling for grooms.

MEN'S

Grant McNamara Has Created a Business Being A Concierge for Grooms

- The Chicago-based stylist works with wedding parties to ensure every detail is addressed on their special day.

BY JEAN E. PALMIERI

Grant McNamara could have been filling cavities in kids' teeth, but he decided to ditch the idea of dental school to try his hand in fashion instead.

And three years ago, the Chicago native found his niche: styling grooms for their upcoming weddings. The business was rapidly gaining momentum until the pandemic led to an abrupt pause in the number of ceremonies. But McNamara is poised for what he expects to be a flurry of events in the near future as weddings and other special occasions are rescheduled. And he'll be ready.

McNamara has had a love of fashion since he was a child. "Style was always important to us growing up," he said, adding that his mother insisted that his clothes had to be ironed before he left the house.

But his initial path was down a different road. He got a communications degree in college and worked at a commercial real estate company after graduation. He quit that job on his 24th birthday when an opportunity arose to help a local fashion designer run his business. McNamara did everything from modeling to revamping the web site and realized that he'd found his calling. "I knew then that this was what I wanted to do," he said.

He set out to learn everything he could about the men's wear business, including the finest fabrics, the special details needed to create custom clothing, and how to make patterns. That soon

led to some freelance styling for Chicago athletes and television personalities. But it was when his aunt, a party planner, asked him to work with a groom and his groomsmen at a wedding she was working on that it clicked.

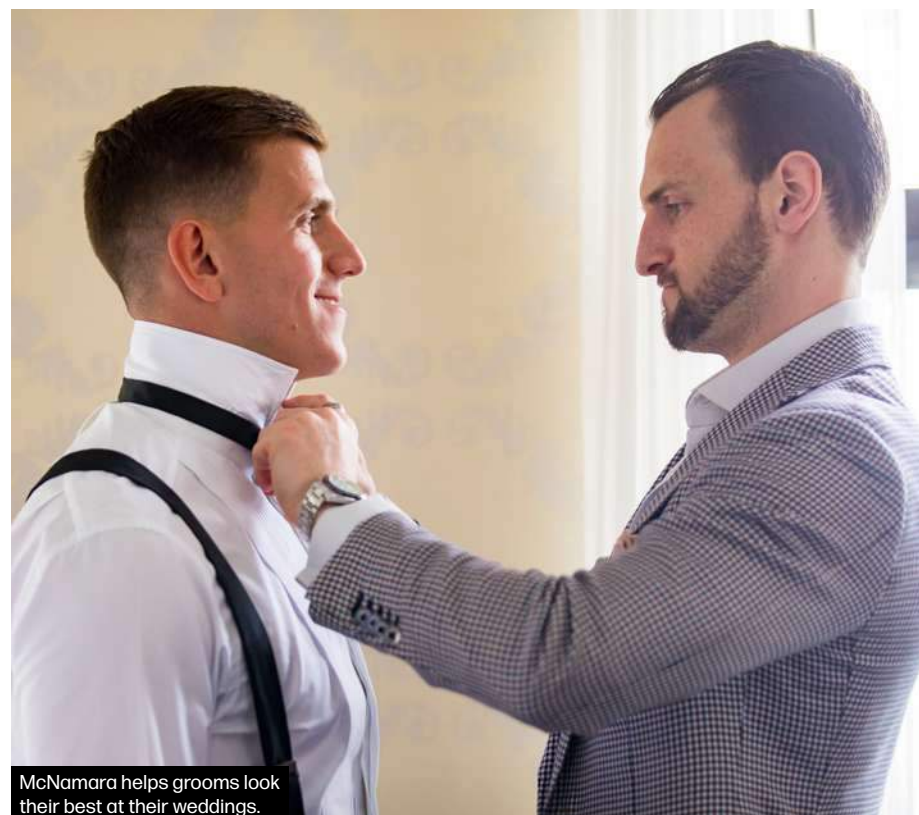
"They just kept saying what a cool service this is and I realized it could be something," he said.

He came up with a name and launched a web site — GPS, which stands for Gentleman's Personal Stylist. "We worked on around 16 weddings in 2018, 30 in 2019 and this year, we were going to do between

50 and 60 until everything happened," he said. "But it proved that there's interest."

The way it works is that a groom or bride contacts him, often through their wedding planner or because they happened upon his web page, and they start a conversation about the theme of the upcoming nuptials and their personal style. While some guys have specific requests such as a Tom Ford or Gucci suit, others will work with McNamara to create garments to their specifications.

His services include designing and coordinating everything from tuxedos or suit shirts to ties and shoes. He'll even work



McNamara helps grooms look their best at their weddings.

with grooms on outfits for the honeymoon if they so desire. Together, they choose the fabrics, the silhouette, the details and the personalized options such as special quotes that can be inscribed on linings. "For my own wedding," he said, "I had the date inscribed in the heel of the shoe."

If a customer opts for McNamara to make the suits, he uses manufacturers in either China or Italy, depending upon what the customer wants to spend.

McNamara, or one of his stylists, will also be on site on the day of the wedding to address any last-minute issues and ensure the guys look great. "You'd be surprised how often a guy forgets to zip his fly or a button falls off," he said.

Most of his clients — around 75 percent — will opt for both consultations in advance and day-of help.

"Our clients care about the experience, and more and more, guys are allowing themselves to say that out loud," he said. So whether it's advice on haircuts, skin care or other topics, GPS provides a space where they're comfortable asking those questions.

"They like to know that they have someone who cares about them," McNamara said.

His fees range from \$750 to show up at a wedding to \$1,500 for his most popular package that includes regular consultations before the wedding, assistance finding the right outfit, discounts on custom clothing and shoes as well as for groomsmen's outfits, and one to two stylists on hand before and during the event.

His top-of-the-line package starts at \$3,500 and includes consultations in advance, a custom tuxedo or suit, dress shirt, tie, pocket square and shoes. Add-ons include styling for the engagement party, a hosted fitting party at the Union League Club of Chicago and a groom's concierge service.

He said guys today are most interested in looking modern without straying too far from traditional. So McNamara will steer them toward a patterned vest under a solid-color tuxedo or suit, for example, as a way to look updated. He's partial toward donegals and flannels for fall and winter and is seeing more clients opt for forest green or blue rather than black.

He said he won't ever design anything ridiculously flashy, but rather something high quality and versatile that guys can wear 10 years down the road. "If they're spending \$2,000 or \$3,000 on a custom suit, they want to wear it later," he said.

Most of the weddings he works on are in the Chicago area, but back before the pandemic, he also worked on destination weddings in other cities.

Looking ahead, he hopes to expand his services to other cities, but the health crisis delayed those plans a year and he's now looking at 2022 to bring his show on the road.

While his business dropped off as a result of the pandemic, McNamara has concentrated not only on enhancing his web presence but also on perfecting his skill as a tailor. Although he can sew on a button or do a minor adjustment, he's teaching himself the finer points of tailoring in hopes that one day he'll be able to create bespoke outfits himself.

"I'm very positive and optimistic and I've looked at this year as an opportunity to build a foundation for the business," he said. "We used to get clients through word-of-mouth or wedding planners, but now we're getting more business through the web site, so we're really honing our offer and making the business streamlined so when things open up, we will be as strong as we can be."

He said he's already seeing an uptick in interest as weddings are being rescheduled for next year or even 2022. "There's going to be an explosion and the business will be in a better place to capitalize on it," he said.