The day had finally arrived. The weather was great, the flowers were in place, the guests took their places and Nicole Rios and Brian Jennison were ready to pledge their lives and love to each other.

Nicole and Brian were new to all this, but for the Smittcamp Alumni House, the Rios-Jennison nuptials on June 2, 2012, were another great occasion in its connection between campus and community.

And there could be more such events as the Fresno State Alumni Association actively markets the grand, traditional Smittcamp Alumni House for weddings, receptions, business meetings, banquets and other events.

In its first 12 years, the Alumni House has become a busy venue. With the help of Facebook and Google Places pages, started in 2011, the intent is to increase the pace by engaging students, alumni and the community.

"Many people meet at Fresno State, get engaged and want to have their wedding or reception here," says Hank Charles (2009), the assistant director of business development for the Fresno State Alumni Association. "We want to grow the awareness that the house is available. Every student, by graduation, should know about the Smittcamp Alumni House."

The Smittcamp Alumni House offers four meeting and conference rooms, which can hold 10-95 guests depending on the event, reception and social areas, an alumni library and two courtyards.

For more information and reservations, call 559.278.2761 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. weekdays or visit www.FresnoStateAlumni.com
When it comes time to mark significant personal events or schedule workshops or other meetings, Charles hopes that the Smittcamp Alumni House will be a top choice. That was the goal from the beginning, but it wasn’t until 2012 that a position was created to seek off-campus rentals of the Smittcamp Alumni House, cultivate and oversee affinity partner agreements and secure sponsorship for major Alumni Association events.

The idea for the Alumni House stemmed from many discussions by alumni and long-time Fresno State supporters William Forbes (1948) and Earl Smittcamp (1939).

Shortly after Jacquelyn Glasener (2002) became the Alumni Association executive director in 1997, Peter N. Smits, vice president for University Advancement, called her into his office to discuss plans for an alumni building. Some of the money would come from a gift from Earl and Muriel Smittcamp to develop an honors college and an alumni house.

The 10,000-square-foot Smittcamp Alumni House opened its doors on March 21, 2000 – the first stand-alone alumni headquarters building on any of the 23 California State University campuses.

An immediate benefit was visibility for the Alumni Association, previously housed in the nondescript Keats Building in the center of campus, says Glasener. The setting wasn’t particularly captivating, and there was little room for staff, let alone visitors.

The Smittcamp Alumni House is “a monument on campus that distinguishes a place for generations of Fresno State alumni to come together,” Charles says. “From current students to alumni who’ve graduated over the decades, the house is available to them in many different ways.”

Inside the towering double doors of the Alumni House, between pillars that help provide a distinctively classical architectural look, is a desk in the lobby staffed by students. A sweeping staircase provides access to the balcony and second floor; a piano, chandelier and period furniture add to the atmosphere.

Students welcome visitors, direct them to locations around campus and guide guests to events in the Alumni House or on the manicured, colorful grounds outside.

“Students play a key role for us. When we have after-hours or weekend events they are in charge,” says Jennifer Burgess, the Alumni House manager. “We couldn’t host all of the events here if it weren’t for our student staff.”

Bryan Felix, a junior Mass Communication and Journalism major from Selma, is a Smittcamp Alumni House intern, responsible for greeting guests, answering phones and providing tours.

“It’s an awesome job to work in a building that was made possible by a family of Fresno State alumni like the Smittcamps,” Felix says.

Recent updating, painting and technology upgrades should add to its appeal as an event and meeting venue, as well as a photo backdrop, which has benefitted from the ultramodern University High School, just to the west.

“We have a lot of people who like the urban-style photos, so we’ve seen photos with University High School in the background because that sunset has a really nice glow when you’re standing out on the lawn area of the Alumni House,” Burgess says.

“We loved the look of the house, and it was large enough to accommodate us, but more personal than a hotel,” says Nicole Jennison, who had also attended many events at the Smittcamp Alumni House as a Smittcamp Family Honors College President’s Scholar.

Having a double connection to the campus as students and to the Smittcamp Alumni House, she adds, “was a nice, natural fit.”

And the Alumni Association is hoping for more such choices as the Smittcamp Alumni House more strongly establishes its role as the campus’ welcoming front door.

– Nicole Maul, a senior agriculture communications major, is a social media student assistant in the Office of University Communications.