



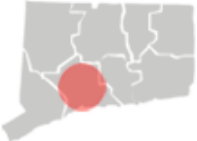
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Same-sex couples celebrate right to marry

By MARC LEVY, Herald staff
10/10/2008

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NEW BRITAIN - Same-sex couples have faced a complicated and demeaning path to marriage, said members of the area's gay and lesbian community, and they were beyond delighted by the state Supreme Court's decision Friday overturning a ban on the real thing.



"This is absolutely groundbreaking," said Laura Saunders, a Wethersfield resident who has been with her partner, Ozlem Camli, for 14 years. They pair have two children.

Advertisement While Saunders and Camli have been able to take part in a civil union in Connecticut since 2005, they refused what they considered a half-measure.

"We have been holding out for the real deal," Saunders said. Proponents of same-sex marriage rights say there are more than 1,000 federal benefits and protections pertaining to married couples that can't be used by people in civil unions, a legal construct without a religious element. Saunders and Camli had to find alternatives to those rights, which usually take more effort and expense.

Perhaps the most striking example of this was getting citizenship for Camli, who emigrated from Turkey. It took a decade. Saunders estimated the process would have taken a third of that time if Camli could have merely married an American.

"She had to take the long route and the hard route," said Saunders, who planned to be at Thursday's celebratory rally in Hartford.

For Stephen Hard, president of the Greater New Britain Arts Alliance and a city resident, a civil union was necessary but not enough. He and partner Mark Giuliotti were married privately Dec. 26, 1997, then had to spend \$1,000 on a lawyer on such "legal mumbo jumbo" as ensuring they had power of attorney for each other. They still had to pay taxes on health benefits, which married couples do not.

Then the two signed papers for a civil union a couple of years ago, done for "expedience,

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and not with any joy," Hard said Friday, preparing for his organization's weekend tour of historic homes.

Now they look forward to marrying again - with civic significance if not with a fancy cake.

"Now that we can actually be married in public, I'm interested," Hard said. "There was no way I was going to celebrate a civil union. It was riding in the back of the bus.

"I'd been praying for it," he said of same-sex marriage rights. "I think it's important for society, It's important for us, but when society creates a second-class citizenship, it's bad for society."

Hard is disappointed the move came out of the courts instead of the General Assembly, as a law crafted by legislators "with guts," and feels let down by Gov. M. Jodi Rell's stance on the issue. She issued a statement after the court decision saying she believed a marriage was between a man and woman and that her signing of a civil union law had been adequate.

South Church respectfully disagrees. Its pastor, the Rev, George Harris, spent some of Friday reading and analyzing the court's 4-3 ruling, and agreed with Hard that same-sex couples have been made to feel second class. "As a pastor, that has been my experience," he said. "A same-sex couple comes to me to say 'We want to get married,' and I have to have this whole conversation: 'Now, you know this church will recognize you're married in the eyes of God, but it won't have legal standing.' That sets them apart. That makes them less than."

His congregation - some 415 people and growing - voted unanimously four years ago to adopt the "Open and Affirming" designation within the United Church of Christ and American Baptist Church and has been a home for same-sex marriages since.

"This would not be a significant change for us," he said, referring to the court decision. He estimates up to eight area couples have been married at South Church, two since he arrived a year ago. "They are not legally binding marriages, but we have performed sacred unions the couples have understood as marriages."

Harris is already anticipating a wedding ceremony. He knows of a couple who was planning a civil union and "would be delighted" to have a wedding instead.

Saunders and Camli, their wait over, could be another couple to be wed by Harris - if he can fulfill their dreams of 14 years.

They want a garden party, probably next summer. And a string quartet.

"Something simple," Saunders said.

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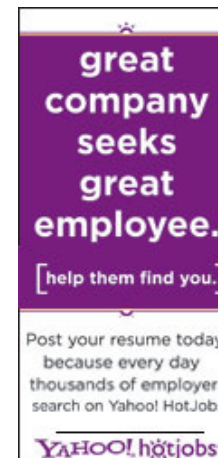


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 Added: Monday October 13, 2008 at 08:47 PM EST

Unconstitutional Fiat Smears Marriage

The Connecticut Supreme Court forced same-sex "marriage" upon our state last week, despite a protest of 75 people for the decision and 3,000 against. Connecticut residents overwhelming oppose such a radical and immoral decision. The Constitution of our state and country do not anywhere state that Connecticut residents have an unalienable right to marriage regardless of their sexual preferences. Expect a swift amendment to this radical and uncalled for change by the left-wing agenda of our Supreme Court.

Tim, New Britain, CT

 Added: Sunday October 12, 2008 at 05:08 PM EST

Bravo to Marriage Equality in CT

Congratulations to all!
And I look forward to officiating at same-sex marriages.
Joseph A. Mustich, Justice of the Peace, Washington CT USA

Joseph A. Mustich, Justice of the Peace, Washington CT USA

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