

Easton Courier

Civil Union Makes History

By Larissa Lytwyn

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Easton residents Arthur Wright and Nick Ferkatch didn't want their civil union ceremony - the first in Easton history - to have a lot of fanfare.

"After the [law] passed, Nick asked me if I wanted to have one," said Wright. "I said I would love it but without all the wedding arrangements."

The first ceremony the two celebrated, on Sept. 12, 1992, "drove me crazy," said Wright. "This civil union would have to be quick and as simple as possible."

It was - barely lasting more than 15 minutes on the morning of Oct. 14. Clarence "Bud" Jennings presided as Justice of the Peace. After the ceremony, the couple enjoyed a low-key celebration at Country Pizza in Monroe.

Wright and Ferkatch have been together for more than 14 years. They met in 1991, shortly before the first Gulf War.

"When we finally met for dinner on Jan. 15 [1991], I remember it well because that was the day we invaded Iraq," said Wright. "I remember it well because as I was driving to this restaurant, the fog was so thick I could hardly see the road. And I was listening to National Public Radio at the time, with the bombs blasting all over the place."

Wright was about an hour and a half late - but Ferkatch was still there, waiting. The two moved to Easton in 1993.

Wright, a native of New York City, is the manager of Rich Worldwide Travel's Gay and Lesbian Travel division.

Ferkatch was raised in a small suburb outside Pittsburgh. He has worked as a computer consultant for more than 30 years.

Ferkatch said he believes the new law gives the idea of a same-sex union "a bit more authenticity."

"I'm not really looking to be authentic or accepted, but now that it's here - great," he said. "It's just beyond my grasp as to why anyone would care whether it is called marriage or joining or whatever. Some say they don't believe in it - good for them - but please don't try to tell me what to believe in or accept."

Wright, who was raised a strict Roman Catholic, said the civil union "is a start toward the right to full marriage."

He characterized the issue as a matter of "civil rights."

Connecticut became the first state to legally sanction gay relationships without the involvement of the courts. Civil unions also are legal in Vermont, and Massachusetts has gay marriage.

The bill passed the state Legislature by large margins and was signed by Gov. M. Jodi Rell. The new law gives gay and lesbian couples the same rights as heterosexual couples at the state level. The federal government, however, does not legally recognize the relationships.

Union vs. marriage

The Roman Catholic Church strongly opposed civil unions, and the state's bishops issued a statement Oct. 1 denouncing the new law.

The statement called civil unions "an assault on the sacrament and institution of marriage and the family. This legislation is an attempt to redesign our society outside of, and in direct contradiction to, the wisdom of our Creator."

According to the bishops, the new law "equates civil unions to marriage" despite transparent attempts to differentiate between the two.

The statement emphasized that marriage was an institution created by God "for the mutual well being of the partners and the procreation of children...Civil unions and same-sex marriages deny children the benefits and uniqueness that a mother and father bring into the lives of their children."

State Rep. John Stripp (R-135) said he opposes civil unions and gay marriage, based on his belief "in the traditional definition" of family.

Stripp voted against the legislation, but said he wanted to make clear that he supports expanding the rights of same-sex couples. He said he simply does not want to equate same-sex relationships with the "2,000 year-old-tradition of [heterosexual] marriage."

Rabbi Fred Greene of Congregation B'nai Israel in Bridgeport, who is active with Connecticut Clergy for Marriage Equality, has a more positive view.

"This law acknowledges that gay men and lesbians have the ability and capacity to fall in love and choose a life partner," he said of civil unions. "But it was a compromise position, and there's more work to be done."

Greene said expanding people's rights is never an easy process, such as with women and people of color in the past. "This is a transformation of people's ideas," he said. Greene said a few decades ago, when he was growing up, he couldn't have imagined the progress that would be made when it comes to gay rights.