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San Francisco officials wed 56 gay couples on Thursday

The first gay marriages to be government-approved were timed to avoid court action by protesting groups

By Tracey Kaplan and Thaa Walker
 Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Racing to beat a conservative legal challenge, San Francisco officials married 56 same-sex couples Thursday in a series of jubilant ceremonies that marked the nation's first government-approved gay marriages.

The first couple to wed were long-time lesbian activists Phyllis Lyon, 79, and Del Martin, 83, who celebrate their 51st anniversary together on Saturday, Valentine's Day. The founders of the first national lesbian rights group were critical players in a carefully timed move by newly elected San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, who took advantage of a brief window of opportunity before the courts get involved.

The earliest that San Francisco's controversial decision could be heard in court is Tuesday because the courts were closed Thursday for Lincoln's birthday and will be closed again Monday for President's Day.

Instead of exchanging vows as husband and wife, Lyon and Martin promised to remain "spouses for life" in an emotional ceremony that set the stage for a new legal battle over the divisive issue of same-sex marriage.

"We've already been together for a long time. It's time to get some benefits out of it," Lyon said outside City Hall after the ceremony, adding that other same-sex couples should continue to fight for equal rights and the

legal benefits of marriage. "There are a lot of enemies out there."

City officials hurried to issue marriage licenses before the Campaign for California Families, a nonprofit organization that promotes family values, could make good on a threat to block them. The group notified the city by letter Wednesday that it would seek a court injunction if Newsom allowed same-sex marriages, as he first promised Tuesday.

The same-sex marriages caught opponents of gay marriage off-guard, but they vowed to be in court early Friday morning to try to stop the city from issuing the licenses. However, the city has 24 hours to respond to the group's request for a restraining order, making Tuesday the likely court date.

"Those marriage licenses aren't worth the paper they're written on," said Mat Staver, president and general counsel of the Liberty Counsel, a Florida-based group representing the Campaign for California Families. "He has no more authority to issue same-sex licenses than he does to secede the city from the state or to give away the state of California to a foreign nation."

Staver said the marriages are illegal because only the state has power over marriage, not cities. He also said the city is violating Proposition 22, the four-year-old California initiative that prevents California from recognizing marriages of same-sex couples performed outside the state.

That proposition clearly defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman. But gay rights advocates say the law's impact is limited because it changed only a section of the state's family code that applies to

recognition of gay marriages in other states, not to California's definition of marriage.

Staver said the group will seek to impeach Newsom, who was elected in November.

"We'll pursue every avenue we can to make this mayor stop," Staver said. "He's only been in office for two months, so we think the worst is yet to come. He needs to learn his lesson and leave his office."

San Francisco Assessor Mabel Teng, who presided over many of the ceremonies, defended the licenses, which will stand through Valentine's Day, when gay rights activists plan to hold a rally in Sacramento. The rally will celebrate Newsom's action, as well as a new bill introduced this week by Assemblyman Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, that would legalize gay marriage.

"This is uncharted ground," Teng said. "I don't know whether other counties will recognize them, but as far as we're concerned they are just as valid as any other marriage."

Newsom took the unprecedented step of moving forward on the issue without a state mandate because he believes discrimination against gay marriage is prohibited under the equal protection clause of the California Constitution.

"America has struggled since its inception to eradicate discrimination in all forms," Newsom said Thursday in a news statement. "Today a barrier to justice has been removed. A barrier removed for one person is a barrier removed for us all."

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Gold Beach bridge restoration uncovers objects from 1930s

Workers found items including bottle caps, a chisel and an empty pack of cigarettes

By Michael Martinez
 Chicago Tribune (KRT)

GOLD BEACH — Where the mountains meet the sea and fog mingles with ocean spray, Josh Rodriguez is jackhammering for gold in the landmark Rogue River Bridge.

The construction worker has permission to chisel into the cultural asset: It's one of several iconic spans being renovated by Oregon, a bridge that's labeled a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

Standing inside a huge enclosure 45 feet above the Rogue River, Rodriguez chipped away at an arch's crumbling concrete, embedded with stones — and maybe a bonanza.

"They call this Gold Beach because there was gold here and they built this using material from the area, but I haven't found any gold yet," said Rodriguez, 25.

The only pay dirt he has found are bottle caps, a chisel and an empty pack of smokes, he said.

That's because when a Great Depression job program turned destitute farmers and fishermen into construction workers to build the bridge, they weren't the most meticulous craftsmen.

The unskilled laborers, working quickly, tossed their debris into the wooden forms that held freshly poured cement. The bottom of the forms collected the most junk; the frames, made of timber milled up-river, made for better receptacles than the Rogue.

The junk embedded in 230-foot-long majestic arches and slender colonnades — an airy architecture providing portals to forested mountains and the Pacific — has been a rascal to the restoration. It has forced the renovation to exceed its \$18.5 million budget, to a cost yet to be determined, officials said.

Oregon engineers plan to spend three decades restoring this and 10 other bridges along famed coastal

U.S. Highway 101. Oregon's master bridge builder Conde McCullough designed the 11 spans, and in his lifetime built scores of bridges here and in Central America. The last refurbishment is scheduled to be finished in 2022, at a total cost of \$200 million.

The American Society of Civil Engineers took special note of the Rogue River Bridge, citing its use of an innovative construction technique and calling it "the most advanced concrete bridge in America when it was built."

The method required less concrete, though the use of hydraulic jacks to build arch crowns discouraged other builders and later McCullough, who never built another like it, state officials said. Oregon is seeking to place the Rogue River Bridge and other coastal masterpieces by McCullough on the National Register of Historic Places.

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