

STRAUSS (LEFT) AND HAMMOND
CELEBRATE THEIR WEDDING IN
JULY 2012

Legal Lines

NAVIGATING THE TIDE OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY

The biggest and best marriage news of 2012 was the advance of equal rights for LGBT folks: Washington, Maryland and Maine voted to legalize gay marriage and Minnesota voted not to constitutionally ban it. But that also leaves gay people in a patchwork maze of marriage recognition laws.

"The major thing that happened was that as soon it was legal for same-sex couples to have marriages there was a huge rush for people to go ahead and get their certificate," says Doug Hamilton of Equal Rights Washington. He says that despite the initial spike in demand, others are planning on waiting for important dates or having summer weddings — just like the straights. Has anyone else noticed that the world hasn't ended?

While Oregon's neighbor to the north is new to marriage equality, New York made the change in 2011. Oregonian-turned-New Yorker Tim Hammond and his now-husband, Nathan Strauss, returned to Oregon in July 2012 to tie the knot with family and friends — with everything except the legal mini ceremony, which they took care of a week later in New York.

Hammond and Strauss decided to return to the Northwest for their wedding because "Our really good friends that we have in the city were then able to come back and see where we were from, meet our families and experience Oregon," Hammond says. His twin brother organized a trip on a BrewCycle (a 15-person tandem bike with a table in the middle) for a breweries tour of the Pearl District in Portland, and some of Strauss' family took a sternwheeler on the Columbia Gorge.

While their marriage didn't become legal in the eyes of New York State for another week, Hammond says that for him, the big ceremony with family and friends was the real one. Still, they wanted to show guests that the ceremony had teeth. "We actually got the license before and made a photocopy and brought it to Oregon with us and sort of had it on display near the gift table," he says.

Equal Rights Washington's Hamilton cautions that while two gay Oregonians could hop across the Columbia and get hitched, he recommends against it. "One thing that people need to be aware of it is that if you get married in a state, you also have to be divorced in that state," he says. While that ceremony might be meaningful, it doesn't include any legal rights in Oregon, and it could create legal headaches later.

"Within the state, marriage equality is a wonderful thing," Hamilton says, "but we still don't have federal recognition of it, so there's still a lot of ongoing work that needs to be done to ensure that same sex couples have all their rights nationally and when they're traveling internationally."

Planning a wedding in a state without marriage equality made him a little nervous, Hammond admits, but he didn't have any bad experiences. "There were not any vendors that were weird about it, from the transportation guy who handled all the shuttle buses to the caterer to anyone," he says.

But there was a slightly awkward moment that Hammond laughs about. It shows how far we've come. He called a vendor and was asked, "What is your bride's name?"

"Um, Nathan," Hammond said.

"Oh, OK!" the vendor said. And that was that. — Shannon Finnell



JULIANA PATRICK PHOTOGRAPHY

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