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A Milestone for Gays, A Boon for Massachusetts

Nonresidents' Same-Sex Weddings Bring Economic Boost

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Wednesday, September 3, 2008; A03

PROVINCETOWN, Mass. -- The news flashed to Kathy Arminio as an instant electronic bulletin from a gay rights advocacy group: [New York Gov. David A. Paterson](#) (D) had issued a directive ordering state agencies to recognize same-sex weddings performed in other jurisdictions.

Within seconds of learning about it in May, Arminio, 51, called Kim Angotti, 38, her partner of six years, with the question she had long wanted to ask: "Do you want to get married?"

Angotti called their friend Robert Schlicker, 30, to spread the news. Schlicker called his partner of more than five years, Michael Oswald, 47, and soon the two couples -- two women and two men, all best friends from Rochester, N.Y. -- were planning to turn an August vacation together into a double marriage ceremony in this nationally renowned gay destination on [Cape Cod](#)'s northern tip.

Paterson's directive -- extending same-sex marriage rights to such matters as tax returns and pension benefits -- was soon followed by another move here in Massachusetts, where same-sex marriage became legal in 2004. In July, the legislature passed a repeal of a 1913 statute prohibiting out-of-state residents from marrying in the state unless they intended to reside here. [Gov. Deval L. Patrick](#) (D) signed the repeal at the end of July and took the unusual step of making it effective immediately.

The two steps, taken independently by New York and Massachusetts within about two months, marked an unexpected summer milestone for proponents of same-sex marriage, even as more than 40 other states have enacted constitutional amendments or statutes limiting marriage to a man and a woman. California is the only other state that has legalized same-sex marriage, though that decision by the state's highest court will be subject to a statewide referendum in November.

"I didn't anticipate it happening this fast," Oswald, an analyst for [Xerox](#) in Rochester, said of the changes here. "It wasn't even on my radar screen."

He added: "It was just serendipitous."

The recent changes have prompted a flood of gay New Yorkers coming to Massachusetts to get married -- and that seems to have made same-sex marriage big business for the Bay State.

There are no firm figures on how many gays from New York have come here to marry in the few weeks since the law took effect. But anecdotal evidence suggests the numbers are huge and likely to grow. Hotel rooms are full, flower shops are doing a brisk business, and everywhere, it seems, pedicabs adorned with "Just Married" signs are hauling gay couples down the town's main strip.

Justices of the peace, who perform most of the same-sex weddings, say they are booked solid, often racing directly from one ceremony to the next. Claire Watts, who performed the wedding for the four friends from Rochester, said she had presided over 30 gay weddings so far in August, and "the calls just keep coming."

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Another justice of the peace, Rachel Peters, said: "I'm really busy. I have a full-time job, and this has become a full-time job." Peters, a police officer, said she had to take extra vacation days to perform all the same-sex weddings for out-of-staters, almost all New Yorkers.

Town Clerk Doug Johnstone said Provincetown has become "the premier destination for gay marriage." He said the town first saw a boom in same-sex weddings after they became legal here in 2004, even though out-of-state couples had to express an intent to reside in Massachusetts -- although how to define that intent was left vague and was often at the discretion of local officials. "Now, with the repeal of the 1913 law, we're seeing another little boomlet," Johnstone said.

For the town, that boomlet means an influx of cash at a time when the state is suffering from high unemployment and the effects of a sluggish national economy. "There's got to be some residual economic benefit," Johnstone said, considering the meals, the hotel rooms for family members and friends, and the rings -- a bonanza for local jewelry companies.

Massachusetts requires a three-day waiting period for couples getting a marriage license, and when they are coming from out of state, that translates into three extra days to eat, shop and otherwise spend money.

A report prepared for the Massachusetts economic development office estimated that 32,000 same-sex couples are likely to come to the state to marry over the next three years, pumping about \$111 million into the economy. The report said the state stands to gain about \$5 million of that from sales taxes and the cost of marriage licenses.

The report also predicted that about 44 percent of New York's estimated 48,761 gay couples will come to Massachusetts to wed and that more than 7,000 will come from other nearby states, including New Jersey, New Hampshire and Vermont -- even though those states have not explicitly said they will recognize same-sex marriages performed in other jurisdictions.

"We definitely think this is an economic opportunity for Massachusetts. There's a lot of enthusiasm for this market," said Betsy Wall, director of the state's tourism office. "I think it's good for tourism across the board to be known as a state that's open and welcoming to everybody."

On the beach at Provincetown's Sandcastle Resort, Maria Servedio, dressed in a black tuxedo and hat, married her partner of a dozen years, Elisa Catalioto, who wore a white wedding dress and took Maria's last name. They came from Upstate New York.

"More gay people need to stand up for their rights, because we're human beings," Maria Servedio said. "We've lived together for years. Why shouldn't we have the same rights as everybody else?"

The 1913 law was put in place as a segregationist measure, to prevent blacks and whites from states with Jim Crow laws from coming to Massachusetts to marry. It was enacted in response to heavyweight champion [Jack Johnson's](#) marriage to a white woman, then it lay dormant for decades until then-Gov. [Mitt Romney](#) (R) -- an opponent of same-sex marriage -- invoked it as a way to prevent out-of-state gay couples from coming here to wed.

The repeal effort was led by state Sen. Dianne Wilkerson (D), who came to Massachusetts from Arkansas as a child with her parents, fleeing the [Ku Klux Klan](#). For Wilkerson, the repeal was about not economics but justice. "I could not do to other people what was done to my family," she said in an interview in her office at the State House in Boston.

Arminio and Angotti, and Oswald and Schlicker, married at sundown at Long Point, with a lighthouse and Cape Cod Bay as the backdrop. They stood in a circle of clamshells interspersed with blue and green, blueberry- and pear-scented candles.

"I just wanted to do it -- do it the right way," Arminio said just before the service.

There was an exchange of vows and rings, and music that each couple had selected, and then Watts, the justice of peace, pronounced them married.

"I can't say husband and wife," Watts said. "So I say legally married, spouses for life."

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