

# 'We're giving them full equality'



Rob Smith, right, and Jim McNeely were married Friday, Sept. 13, on the beach in Rehoboth Beach as friends looked on. CHUCK SNYDER PHOTOS

## In Sussex County, out-of-state same sex weddings top the list

**By Jon Bleiweis**  
Staff Writer

REHOBOTH BEACH — A 908 and an 862. A 443 and a 646. A pair of 410s.

Those are the out-of-state area codes of three same-sex couples who Sussex County

Clerk of the Peace John Brady recently officiated the weddings of, and they're three of many out-of-state same-sex weddings that have taken place in Delaware since it was legalized July 1.

Of the 709 marriage licenses issued from July 1-Sept. 17, 173

were obtained by same-sex couples from outside Delaware (104 female and 69 male), while 142 were given to in-state couples (66 and 76, respectively). Those figures are compared to 124 out-of-state traditional licenses and 280 in-state marriage licenses.

Brady has officiated more

than 140 weddings since July 1, for a total of 250 since the start of the year. He can perform as many as seven in a day, he said. From 8 p.m. Sept. 13 to 3 p.m. Sept. 15, there were 20.

"The only time I've been on

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# Wedding

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the beach this summer is with a black robe on," he said with a laugh.

The rise of marriages in the county has turned into an economic boom for Sussex County.

In the last fiscal year, the county received \$121,000 in income from weddings. This fiscal year, which started July 1, that figure has already eclipsed \$70,000, Brady said.

Whether the couple comes from North Carolina, Norfolk, Va., or New Jersey, Brady tries to make the ceremony one that affirms the couple's choice and one that helps them understand and fully realize it, just like he would for any local couple.

"We used to have a lot of people go outside the state. Friends went to Canada to get married or Massachusetts when they

"We wanted a beach environment and one that is very welcoming and where you could really feel a comfort level knowing the population is very inviting and nonjudgmental."

## ROB SMITH

first had marriage equality," he said.

"We're just paying it forward. We're providing a service. There's no law that says you can't get married in another state, so people are coming out. We're recognizing them and giving them full equality."

After 43 years as a couple, Sept. 13, was a day Rob Smith and Jim McNeely of North Carolina had long waited for.

Smith and McNeely lived in Philadelphia for 40 years, and then retired to North Carolina, where friends had moved. But after four years there, and learning about Dela-

ware's new marriage equality laws, the couple felt it was time for change.

"It's a forward-thinking state," Smith said. "We were unhappy where we were living."

Not only did they get married in a small ceremony on the beach in Rehoboth, but the couple plans on moving to the resort city in the spring.

The desire to move to a state where gay marriage is recognized and is also not be too far from Philadelphia made Delaware a logical choice, Smith said.

"It took very little time to make the decision to move here," Smith said.

"It came quite naturally."

Getting married was something something they long desired, Smith said, not only for the tax benefits, but for the legal recognition of their love.

"For me, it's been more of a personal thing of recognition and acceptance," he said.

"I cannot see it having any bearing in changing our relationship, though in terms of our own personal satisfaction or sense of true recognition that we are a committed couple, this is what we see in getting married."

Since the couple lives in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, for the winter months, Smith, 66, and McNeely, 78, plan to move to Rehoboth in the spring. Smith said he's already been in touch with and plans to volunteer at CAMP Rehoboth.

"We wanted a beach environment and one that is very welcoming and where you could really feel a comfort level knowing the population is very

inviting and nonjudgmental," he said.

Rehoboth ranked fourth among cities with populations under 100,000 with 106.87 same sex couples per capita, according to a 2011 report published by the Williams Institute, a national sexual orientation law and public policy think tank based at the University of California, Los Angeles.

"You like to be with your own people," Smith said. "There's a lot of gay residents."

Smith and McNeely's marriage was one of 125 beach weddings expected to take place between April and November in Rehoboth, according to City Manager Gregory Ferrese.

That figure is an increase from 106 last year, and Ferrese credits the increase to the new laws.

"There's no doubt about it," he said.

*jbleiweis@dmg.gannett.com*  
443-210-8125

*On Twitter @JonBleiweis*