

Marriage Equality

Members make it work

By JANE LaTOUR

District Council 37 members were active in the long political struggle for marriage equality in New York State, and when the law was enacted, many worked hard to make that dream a reality by the first day for same-sex weddings, July 24.

It was imperative to speed the process, and members of Clerical-Administrative Employees Local 1549 at City Clerk's offices in each borough volunteered to work on Sunday, as did 82 State Supreme Court Justices, other public employees, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn and City Clerk Michael McSweeney.

Marriage certificates were processed, fees accepted, and on July 24, the usual 24-hour waiting period was waived as gay and lesbian couples who had long been denied the right to marry descended on the City Clerk's offices, eager to say, "I do."

The union workers handled the paperwork and issued



Retired union educator Connie Kopelov, 84 (l.) and Phyllis Siegel, 76, were the first same-sex couple to get married on July 24.

659 marriage licenses (55 percent more than usual) as 484 couples came from near and far to tie the knot on the first day it was possible for them.

Clerical Associate Theresa Preston of the Manhattan office cut short her vacation, returning from County Kerry, Ireland, to help. "It was a big moment in history," she said. "It was very crowded, but we were very organized and it was great to see all those happy people."

Ajah Griffin said many couples were decked out in the rainbow colors and some wore gowns, crowns and tuxedos. "I volunteered because I have a gay parent and gay friends," she said.

"This was a big day," said Chue Keung Mock, who has worked for the City Clerk for 15 months, "and I wanted to witness history," he said. "I felt really helpful and very excited."

Catherine Smalls, another newcomer to her position, said, "It was very fulfilling. It was so crowded and every news station was here. The people had on amazing outfits — flamboyant and colorful. I had a great day!"

"Our members did an excellent job," said Grievance Rep Carmen Flores, "and the new-lweds were very satisfied."

"Our union actively supported the fight for marriage equality, and Local 1549 members were proud to be part of this history-making event," said 2nd Vice President Ralph Palladino.

After a hard but rewarding day, McSweeney gathered his staff to thank them and share letters he received from grateful couples praising the way they were treated.

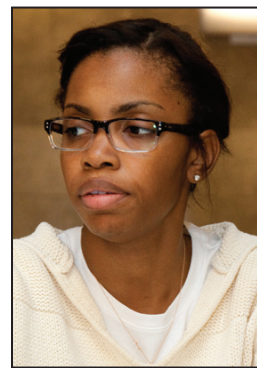
DC 37's Lesbian and Gay Issues Committee supported the bill all the way, and LAGIC Co-chair Valentin Colon, the president of Local 1930, worked with LAGIC members and the Empire State Pride Agenda group to lobby for it.

"This was a long time coming," he said. "Equality is the central idea that makes this historic legislation so important."



A Local 1549 member at the Manhattan City Clerk's office (center) witnesses history July 24 as a same-sex couple receives their marriage license.

Workers speak out



"I wanted to be there because I have a parent and a couple of friends who are gay. Everyone was all dressed up and it was exciting."

Ajah Griffin
Clerical Associate III

"I got to witness history in the making. I felt very excited and also very helpful. It was a very big day and we were all an important part of it."

Chue Keung Mock
Clerical Associate III



"It was nice to see all those happy people. We were very organized. People waited a long time for this moment in history and it was great."

Theresa Preston
Clerical Associate IV

