

TELEGRAPH HERALD

First of IL Civil Union Ceremonies Celebrate Gay Pride and Lesbian Joy

By [Delena Wilkerson](#) Thu, Jun 02, 2011

Six contest winners become first same-sex couples to exchange vows as Illinois implements Civil Union Law.



©2011 Georgia Roulo

Getting a civil union license on June 1 at the clerk's office in Maywood, Illinois, was a breeze for same-sex couple **Steve Coy, 51, and his partner, 41-year-old Felix Diaz** (pictured here), who didn't even arrive until after 1:30 p.m. because they had to work in the morning. Steve said, "We waited in line for about 3 minutes and then spent about 15 minutes in total getting the license. They did it all on the computer, asking us questions relating to us and our parents. I think the parents questions are to make sure the couples aren't related. We paid our \$35 and were done. [It] was actually much faster than I expected."

Dozens of same-sex couples were lined up at the Daley Center in downtown Chicago by 7:30 that morning. "I saw the lines for downtown today," said Steve late Wednesday. "We had really no line at all. I didn't see any others getting civil union [licenses] where we were." According to George P. Tserotas, a supervisor at the Bureau of Vital Records in Maywood, about 12 couples came within the first hour they were available.

Steve and Felix were not affected either by the big group of newlyweds in Millennium Park Thursday morning because their ceremony was just past midnight, making them one of the first same-sex couples to be joined in a legal same-sex union recognized in Illinois. Having their relationship recognized, and gaining legal benefits, was very important to the couple. Steve proposed and the couple was engaged last Thanksgiving. Steve shared some of his thoughts: "Felix had situations when he moved to Illinois two years ago that would have been easier to deal with had we been married. Also, I had a heart attack and quadruple bypass surgery while on vacation

out of town last July. Luckily, it was in Palm Springs and the hospital was totally accommodating since they deal with gay couples every day, but we have heard horror stories of other hospitals that were not as nice. We both know that having the rights of being in a union like this is important for us.”

Illinois Civil Union couples are required to wait a day before exchanging vows. License holders have up to 60 days to do so. But for **Under A New Moon** contest winners Steve and Felix, **Amanda Adelsick and Katrina Miller** (below right), **Christopher Birch and Sam Jamnik** (2nd right, below), **Kimm Farrell and Jo Rodriguez** (3rd right, below), **Ron Maggiore and Jason Fields** (4th right, below), and **Kati Griess, 32, and Esther Baruja, 37** (bottom right), "that day" arrived shortly after midnight on Wednesday, June 1st -- technically Thursday, June 2nd.



Contest organizer Anita Vaughan (left), certified Life-Cycle Celebrant and owner of **AnitaWeds**, performed what appeared to be Illinois' first group of same-sex civil union ceremonies, in a small space decked out for the occasion. "I had been writing letters to my representatives since 2009, when I first heard about the introduction of a civil union bill. When I heard that civil unions would become legal, I knew I wanted to celebrate in some way. I assumed I would just do a free ceremony in the park, but didn't know how to go about finding interested couples," Vaughan noted. After contacting Lauren Smith at **Catalyst Ranch** about possibly having a ceremony there, the celebration expanded. Vaughan added, "Catalyst Ranch jumped right in and we started brainstorming.

We decided to 'dream big' and ask other wedding professionals if they would like to participate. That's how Under a New Moon was born!" This was also the first legally recognized union ceremony for same-sex couples held at Catalyst Ranch according to Lauren Smith, Special Events and Marketing Manager.

Thanks to the generosity of the long list of vendors, including Jeremy Lawson Photography, Toast and Jam DJs, Nika Vaughan, Crowne Plaza Hotel, I Do Films, Entertaining Company, Bleeding Heart Bakery, Luscious Layers Bakery, Katherine Anne Confections, Greatest Expectations Special Events & Weddings, 312photobooth, **SQN Events**, and Tamayo Design, Under A New Moon offered a ceremony accompanied by a plethora of free gifts, including the Crowne Plaza overnight stay, a wedding reception, a beautiful wedding cake, and other treats for the couples and their guests. Vaughan confesses to being "overwhelmed with the response from people in the wedding world. Just about everyone we contacted for help eagerly joined in. Then, when we started planning and getting the word out, I actually had people call me, asking to help!"



For contest winners **Chris and Sam** (right), 29 and 26 respectively, the opportunity to have assistance in creating their ceremony could not have been a bigger blessing. After learning about the civil union bill's passage, this couple of 8 years decided to take the next step together and make their relationship legal. Financial challenges, however, nearly derailed their union indefinitely. "Our original date was set for June 15, 2013, with Rev. Anne Styx officiating. However, we had to postpone the ceremony until further notice due to financial issues. Then, two weeks or so later, I received an email from Rev. Styx explaining the contest and the link to enter. I immediately jumped at the opportunity to enter."



There were nearly 100 people at colorful Catalyst Ranch to support the couples, including parents and friends, plus vendors, photographers, and journalists. Each couple was allowed to invite 12 guests. There were flowers, wine, music and dancing, wedding cake, smiles, and tears.

Contestants **Esther and Kati** (right), 37 and 32 respectively, are celebrating, as many same-sex couples do, their second ceremony. They met in 2004 when Kati was serving as a missionary in Chile. After a brief separation they reunited in Buenos Aires and held their first ceremony there in 2006 with Esther's family. Even so, their excitement and pleasure at the opportunity to be legally united was palpable. When asked if their civil union ceremony felt like a marriage ceremony, both couple offered a resounding "Yes!" but not just because of the ceremony itself, wonderful as it was. As Esther noted, "We will now be legal in Illinois, [and there is] also the fact that Kati is going to change her last name to mine!"



Celebrant Vaughan began the ceremony with a moving welcome and acknowledgment of the historical occasion. Vaughn, who has performed ceremonies since 2008, also said, "I have performed several commitment ceremonies prior to this. I will definitely continue to perform ceremonies for same-sex couples. I'm just so happy that now the ceremonies I perform will be recognized by the state. While I am looking forward to the day that same-sex marriage is recognized in this country, I think this is finally a step in the right direction."