

Gays divided on tying the knot
May be legal, but marriage isn't for everybody
By Sharon Boase
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Gays and lesbians are delighted marriage is now an option from coast to coast -- even those who prefer the single life.

This week's passage of Bill C-38, the Civil Marriage Act, brought two years of fractious debate to an end and opened the door for gays and lesbians to legally wed their partners wherever they live in Canada.

"I'm not necessarily anti-marriage, I'm just anti-marriage for me," said Lyla Miklos, chair of Hamilton Pride. "But marriage is a human rights issue and if straights can get married, gays should be able to as well."

Last week, New Brunswick became the ninth jurisdiction to strike down provincial laws reserving marriage for opposite-sex couples. So just Alberta, Prince Edward Island, Northwest Territories and Nunavut will be forced by Bill C-38 to change their marriage laws.

And while Hamilton-area gays and lesbians generally think that's good, some wonder if the new marriage law simply invites them to make the same mistakes as straight couples.

Hamilton businessman Don Cameron said he and his partner in business and life, Wesley Wait, have no plans to marry. Their 14-year relationship is secure and happy as is, he said.

"Sometimes I forget the importance of all this because I'm lucky enough to live in a liberal town," Cameron said. "My partner and I are regarded as a couple, we're respected as neighbours and business people. I don't have to feel the negative reactions like in small town Canada."

Cameron wishes parliamentarians would get on with more pressing issues, for instance opening up the border to the free flow of Canadian beef and softwood lumber.

Halton Liberal MP Gary Carr broke ranks with the Liberal government to vote against Bill C-38, citing his ongoing worries about the preservation of religious freedoms.

"This has certainly been very, very controversial and very, very emotional on both sides," Carr said.

"I've heard from thousands of constituents on this, most of whom favour traditional marriage. I've never seen as much response on any other issue."

Julie Melanson said she's happy with the new legislation but won't let it rush her to the altar. She and partner Roxanne Tuck, who have three children, will probably marry within the next six months but only when they find the right venue.

"We can't afford anything big right now but it's still important to us, more for our children," said Melanson.

"But if anything, it'll make me take my time. It's not like I have to go out and make a statement."

Cameron said he's seen some gay and lesbian friends take the plunge simply because they could. "I'm so glad that we can now be supported to make the same mistakes as everybody else does," he joked.

But it's no joke, said Sky Gilbert, an award-winning playwright who lives in Hamilton. Marriage is an inherently flawed institution and gays and lesbians would do themselves a favour to keep their relationships non-traditional, he said.

"Men and women, I don't believe they're by nature monogamous so marriage is kind of based on the lie of monogamy," Gilbert said.

With same-sex marriage being legal in Ontario since 2003, some gays and lesbians have become blasé about it, said Rev. Wayne Irwin, pastor at Centenary United Church, one of two gay positive local churches.

"But it does matter," said Irwin. "If your partner is in (hospital) and you can't get in because you're not next of kin, you've been shut out by the system.

"Now, when they travel anywhere in Canada, they're not going to have the question of whether their relationship is legitimate or not."