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Gay marriage

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On Friday, nearly 11 months after the night at the Tempe church, U.S. District Judge John Sedwick sided with the couples in both cases, overturning the ban. The state attorney general announced he would not appeal the ruling and instructed county clerks to issue licenses to all couples.

It would be later in the morning before new licenses were issued, before couples began to speak new vows, but there in that moment, a little past 10:30 a.m., gay marriage became legal in Arizona.

One of the couples in the original lawsuit was in line at that moment to secure a license. Another will obtain one soon. The remaining five, including Connolly and Pochert, had married legally in other states and, in that moment, became legally wed in Arizona. Yet even before that moment, the case had already changed everyone involved.

As the couples celebrated Friday, Aiken reflected on the case.

"I said to one of the young lawyers this morning, 'Cherish this day. It's not going to happen again,'" Aiken said as some of the couples in the suit gathered at the Maricopa County Clerk's Office in downtown Phoenix. "I had one of the partners here come in and say, 'I've lived here since 1955, and I never thought I'd see this day in Arizona.'"

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For Robin and Renee Reece, Saturday brought business as usual, almost. The couple run a wedding-photography business based in Flagstaff, and they had been hired to take pictures at a ceremony in Phoenix. The women marrying had set the date for their wedding months before, without knowing whether they could bring a license.

"They were texting us about it all morning, wanting to know if they could go get their license yet," Renee said Friday. "It's just so surreal and exciting, not just for us, but for all the couples we photograph who can now legally get married."

Robin and Renee have been together about seven years, but it wasn't until they had a baby together in 2010 that they took the notion that they needed legal protection for their family seriously. When they heard about the case against Arizona's ban, they signed on quickly.

In August, they married legally in Hawaii, so Friday's decision didn't mean a trip to the courthouse.

"It was all worth it, absolutely 100 percent," Renee said. "We decided to fight for our family and our kids. To see this overturned and all this excitement happening ... I've been shaking all morning."

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Christopher Devine awoke Friday to a flurry of text messages and notes on social media, all excited about the news he hadn't yet heard. A judge had overturned the state's same-sex marriage ban.

Devine and his husband, Mason Hite, joined the case against the ban early this year, largely to protect their three adopted sons. They had married in San Diego in 2008, but when they adopted the boys, only Hite was identified as a father.

The oldest of the boys, 9-year-old Ricky, was aware of the lawsuit and his dad's involvement. He was, Devine said, indignant that the state would refuse to



Photographers Renee (left) and Robin Reece, who were married in Hawaii, chat Saturday with newlyweds Krista Castillo and Ellie Sauter (right).

DAVID KADLUBOWSKI/THE REPUBLIC

recognize that his fathers were married. "He'd say, 'You are married,' and I'd say, 'I know that and you know that, but the state doesn't think we are,'" Devine said Friday. "This morning I explained to him that the judge decided that we were right. His reaction was, 'Well, of course you were.'"

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Peter Bramley and Jeff Ferst found each other later in life than some of the other couples in the marriage case. Bramley had been married to a woman for 32 years and raised two kids. He didn't want to settle for anything less than legal marriage.

The couple married in Palm Springs on Valentine's Day 2013, but Arizona did not recognize their union. They signed on with Aiken's team hoping to change that. When change arrived Friday, they realized they felt ... normal.

"We're just like any couple who was married in another state," Bramley said from their home in Tucson. "We have all the rights and responsibilities of any other couple in Arizona. And that's all we ever wanted. I'm just thrilled at what this means for people who are just figuring out who they are."

With one victory in hand, they see other challenges for their community.

"There is still discrimination in housing and people can still be fired for being gay," Ferst said. "This is a major achievement in getting recognized that we're equal under the law as a married couple, but there are still laws that need to be stricken from the books. And we have a long way to go for people to see us the way we are."

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Weeks before the conversation in the Tempe church, Natalie and Meagan Metz were talking with a close friend in Flagstaff, a lawyer named Ryan Stevens. The topic was marriage.

"Why don't we push it in Arizona?" Meagan remembers him saying.

"That'll take forever," another friend said. But Meagan couldn't stop thinking

about it. She and Natalie had married legally in Seattle, but planned to stay in Flagstaff. When the opportunity arose to join Stevens in the lawsuit with Aiken, the couple said yes instantly.

The wait, Meagan discovered Friday, was worth every interminable minute.

"I felt it this morning," she said. "I feel very much more at home in my own home. I really did feel a significant change today. I feel it for myself and for my wife."

She knew many of her friends were lining up at the Coconino County courthouse for a marriage license.

"It means something completely different," she said, "to be in my home state and be recognized as a married couple."

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At a Phoenix resort a week ago, Holly Mitchell and Suzanne Cummins traded vows, seven years after their first date at an Arizona Diamondbacks game. They had set a date back in April and decided not to wait for the court.

As other court decisions pushed Arizona's case closer to resolution, Mitchell and Cummins measured the value of their decision to join the suit and perhaps ensure legal protection for their adopted daughters.

Deciding to move forward with their wedding without a ruling, Mitchell said a week ago, "A wedding is a celebration with friends and family of the couple's love and commitment. Ours will be no different."

Not even a week after their wedding, they could make it officially legal. But the trip to the County Clerk's Office would have to wait.

On the morning the judge ruled in their case, Mitchell and Cummins were in Paris, on their honeymoon.

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Clark Rowley and David Chaney had lined up at the County Clerk's Office by late morning.

"There were times when I wondered if this was ever going to happen," Rowley said. "It was a long road and sometimes it

grew tiresome waiting. But it was worth it. It all happens in time."

Rowley and Chaney met in 2008. In 2010, they held a commitment ceremony in downtown Scottsdale.

They could have married out of state and nearly did at least twice, but ultimately decided they wanted a license from Arizona, so they waited and, early this year, joined Aiken's suit.

"Our case has been brought together by a private individual with a private law firm with help from law students at the ASU law school," Rowley said. "To me, that shows the amount of community support we had and their beliefs in what we're doing. It's been overwhelming."

By midafternoon Friday, surrounded by friends, Rowley and Chaney put the marriage license to work and traded vows legally at the Scottsdale Civic Center, right in front of the big LOVE sculpture.

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Joe Connolly and Terry Pochert had built a life together by December of last year. They had cobbled together enough legal documents in Arizona to ensure they could protect each other.

But as much as they wanted legal recognition for themselves, they saw others with greater needs, people at their church who worried about their families, who couldn't solve their legal problems. So they enlisted Aiken and went to work.

They could scarcely describe their joy Friday.

"We went to the clerk's office this morning," Connolly said Friday. "It was truly mind-boggling to finally see people get married. While we were there, two couples we've known for years showed up and decided to get married. I don't think the full impact of what has occurred has hit us."

From the start, Connolly and Pochert have drawn on their faith to sustain them.

"There has been a phrase that has been used against the gay community,"

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