

Gay-marriage laws to boost wedding trade



AP Photo: Ted S. Warren. IMAGE: Revelers display U.S. and gay pride flags as they celebrate early election returns favoring Washington state Referendum 74, which legalized gay marriage, during a large impromptu street gathering in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood, Nov. 7, 2012.

AP 11/18/12 | By Clarke Canfield

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Gay wedding spending is expected to generate at least \$166 million in revenue in Maine, Maryland and Washington, where gay marriage was just legalized.

PORTLAND, Maine — In the two weeks since Maine voters approved a law allowing same-sex marriage, Clay Hill Farm has been getting phone calls and emails from gay couples inquiring about open dates and wedding packages at the restaurant and wildlife sanctuary, a popular wedding spot in York.

The law won't go into effect for more than six weeks, but already couples from in and out of state have called, said Jennifer Lewis-McShera, who heads the wedding department there.

Clay Hill Farm puts on dozens of wedding ceremonies a year, as well as receptions and rehearsal dinners, and provides catering services to wedding parties at other locations. Legalizing same-sex marriage can only help, Lewis-McShera said.

"It will increase business in this area because we'll attract more couples from Boston and the New York metropolitan area who now can have the wedding of their dreams in Maine," she said. "This puts Maine on the map."

Add the coast of Maine, the banks of the Chesapeake Bay and the shores of Lake Washington to gay wedding destinations. Next month and in January, laws go into effect



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in Maine, Maryland and Washington that allow same-sex marriage. They're the first states where voters approved such laws, rather than legislators or courts.

Nearly 18,000 same-sex couples in those states will exchange vows in the first three years after the new laws are in effect, estimated The Williams Institute, a national think tank at the UCLA School of Law, and the laws should generate at least \$166 million in wedding spending in the three states over the next three years from in-state couples alone, boosting tax revenues and creating new jobs.

Wedding-related spending for in-state couples is projected be about \$16 million in Maine, \$63 million in Maryland and \$89 million in Washington.

The numbers go up when figuring in out-of-staters who travel to those states to be wed. In Maine, for instance, the new law could boost the state economy by \$25 million and create up to 250 new jobs in the coming three years, said Lee Badgett, research director at the Williams Institute and an economics professor at the University of Massachusetts.

So many people have ties to Maine through vacations, summer camps while growing up or seasonal homes, said Portland wedding planner Diane York. A lot are attracted to Maine for weddings and receptions because of its beaches, old New England churches and lighthouses, such as Portland Head Light in Cape Elizabeth, which went into service in 1791 and has been called one of the most-photographed lighthouses in the country.

"Now Maine will be able to make its case: This is beautiful, you should come here to get married," Badgett said.

The average cost for a wedding nationally is about \$27,000, and about \$2,000 less in Maine, York said.

Other states that have legalized gay marriage have benefited economically as a result. Same-sex marriage is legal in Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Vermont and the District of Columbia.

Vermont and Massachusetts now include sections on their state tourism websites that include information about gay marriage. Even honeymoon capital Niagara Falls has gotten a lift from same-sex weddings and honeymoons.

In Maine, Pam Remy of South Portland and her partner of 13 years, Karen Weiss, have just begun to plan for a late summer or early fall wedding. They're looking into pastoral settings in southern Maine to host the wedding and are hoping to have up to 200 guests.

The to-do list is the same that same many couples face when planning a wedding: find a venue, print invitations, hire a photographer and arrange for food and entertainment. Remy, 44, says they have to find a place soon because venues are being booked quickly.

"I imagine this wedding will be the whole shebang," Remy said.

Cindy Sproul co-owns North Carolina-based Rainbow Wedding Network, which produces gay and lesbian wedding expos in Seattle and other cities. Just since the election, she's seen a 30 to 40 percent increase in companies wanting to advertise with the company in Washington state.

Thousands of in-state residents, as well as those from nearby states that haven't legalized gay marriage, are expected to exchange vows in Washington in the coming years.

"There are a lot of couples that will cross state lines to get married. Maybe they want to make a long weekend of it," Sproul said. "I imagine there will be couples from Oregon who will come up."

In Maine, a Portland man has launched what he's calling the first online wedding



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directory, www.gayweddingsinmaine.com, connecting same-sex couples with gay-friendly businesses. Sid Tripp, who owns a marketing company and is president of the DownEast Pride Alliance gay business networking group, said Maine's new law should benefit such companies as tuxedo rental shops, caterers, florists, photographers, jewelers, limousine services, musicians and DJs.

"Maine has positioned itself as a progressive, forward-looking state that is welcoming to everybody," Tripp said. "The gays will see this as a sign of solidarity with them, and they'll be coming here in droves wanting to get married."

Associated Press writer Phuong Le in Seattle contributed to this report.

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