

Number of same-sex couples rises dramatically in Nevada

By Steve Timko, Reno Gazette-Journal

Same-sex couples increased by 44 percent in Nevada from 2000 to 2010, revised U.S. Census Bureau figures show, while families increased by only 32 percent in the same period.

A Douglas County same-sex couple said there has been a significant change in attitudes toward gay and lesbian couples in Nevada in the past two decades. A University of Nevada, Las Vegas law school professor said changing cultural attitudes could affect how the law is interpreted for same-sex couples. And the man who led the effort in Nevada to define marriage as being between a man and a woman expects the U.S. Supreme Court will ultimately weigh in at least one more time on the issue.

Census figures originally released in August for same-sex couples in the United States were revised after the bureau discovered errors caused by the wording of questions. The revised figures released last week showed 7,140 same-sex couples in Nevada in 2010, compared with 4,973 in 2000. The 2010 figures showed 681 same-sex married couples in Nevada.

One was Joe Edson and Mike Hardie of Douglas County, who got married in Cape Cod, Mass., in August 2008.

Hardie, a math professor at Western Nevada College, moved to Nevada in 1981 and came out to his wife, who had been his high school sweetheart, in 1995 after 24 years of marriage.

Hardie said his wife wouldn't let him move out until he explained to their daughters, then ages 18 and 16, why their marriage was ending, which he said in retrospect was a great decision.

“I have several friends who have tried to hide their sexual persuasion from their children, and it’s been disastrous,” Hardie said.

Hardie and Edson have been a couple since 1996. Edson, now systems/technical director for the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada, moved to Nevada and in 1998 enrolled in the University of Nevada, Reno.

Edson said that, as a couple, they have “jumped through all the legal hoops backwards” to get many of the same rights and protections that come to opposite-sex couples. That includes legal powers of attorney for health issues and revocable trusts. Edson said he had to be treated for colon cancer in 2004 and that helped propel the decision to get family rights.

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