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Marriage business

Gay businesses urged to assert themselves in health-care, same-sex-marriage debates

By [Kel Munger](#)

It was warm and sunny, as usual, on the evening of September 18. About a hundred dedicated supporters of marriage equality had gathered on the west side of the Capitol to urge the governor to sign AB 43, a bill granting access to legal marriage to same-sex partners. A bill like this has been passed two previous legislative sessions, only to be vetoed by the governor, who continues to insist “the will of the people,” as expressed in Proposition 22, is opposed to marriage equality.

Of course, “the people” elected the senators and Assembly members who keep passing legislation to grant legal recognition to same-sex marriages.

Among those gathered in support of the bill were Ellen Pontac and Shelley Bailes. Partnered for 34 years, they’ve been fighting for equality almost that entire time, and they were legally married, albeit briefly, when San Francisco issued marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples in 2002. They were glad the rally had turned out a decent showing, since it was pulled together at the last minute with little in the way of publicity.

A few blocks north, 110 local business leaders gathered at the Holiday Inn for an event that was every bit as gay-friendly, though much more upscale. The well-dressed men and women of the Rainbow Chamber of Commerce were hosting their first ever installation dinner, complete with a chicken entrée and a keynote address by a politician.



Guy Crouch (left), past president of the Rainbow Chamber of Commerce, congratulates his successor, Fred Palmer.

SN&R Photo By Kel Munger

“Isn’t this fun?” said outgoing chamber president Guy Crouch. The owner and operator of Strategic Accounting Solutions was preparing to pass the torch to incoming president Fred Palmer, publisher of Outword Magazine.

After a warm welcome, state Senator Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, referred to the rally in support of marriage equality in his speech. But then he quickly turned to the topic at hand: business.

“You’re in business,” he told the group, “so you know how important health care is to your success.” He urged them to join with other chambers of commerce to work for health-care reform as a way to keep their businesses healthy.

Palmer’s remarks tied marriage equality and the chamber’s mission together by noting that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has declared California “open for business.” But, he said, that message is undercut by the governor’s stated intention to veto AB 43. “The state’s open for business, but not for gay and lesbian businesses and our families and friends,” said Palmer as he urged the chamber’s members to speak out for equality in order to strengthen both business and family.

There’s more than one way to create change. Sometimes it takes a picket sign, and sometimes it takes a chicken dinner.