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## Cash registers expected to ring

### Some valley businesses profiting already from ruling

NICOLE C. BRAMBILA • THE DESERT SUN • JUNE 15, 2008

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Local shop owners hope the expected wave of same-sex weddings will bring a much-needed boost to the Coachella Valley economy as the desert heads into its traditionally slow summer season.

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A recent study suggests it just might, which has community leaders poised to remarket Palm Springs.

"We're quickly moving to position Palm Springs as sort of the gay Las Vegas for weddings," Scott Hines, a senior partner with Burke, Rix, Hines and Associates, a Palm Springs-based communications firm said.

"The easier you make it for people to plan their wedding ceremony the more likely they are to choose your community over San Francisco."

Starting Tuesday, gays and lesbians have the legal right to marry in California.

The California Supreme Court ruled last month that a ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional.

A UCLA study released earlier in the month projects that about half of California's 102,600 same-sex couples will marry in the next three years.

These and out-of state couples are expected to spend more than \$683 million on tourism and their weddings.

Among the report's other findings:

California same-sex couples will inject about \$392.3 million in wedding spending into the economy in the next three years.

Marriage license fees for same-sex couples will generate \$8.8 million.

Wedding spending will create and sustain more than 2,100 new California jobs.

While no estimates are available for the Coachella Valley, local businesses and Palm Springs Mayor Steve Pougnet are eager to capture a chunk of those gay dollars.

"We're one of the primary gay and lesbian destinations in the world," said Casey Jones, administrator with Greater Palm Springs Wedding Association.

"Overall, it will definitely contribute to the economy. Quite frankly, we hope it continues after November 4th, strictly from a business perspective. We can all use a shot in the arm."



Deborah Quinn, owner of Pastry Swan Bakery in Cathedral City, is already seeing a spike in business as local gay and lesbian couples make plans to marry starting Tuesday. (Richard Lui, The Desert Sun)



Head cake decorator at Pastry Swan Bakery in Cathedral City (Richard Lui, The Desert Sun)

#### REPORTING HISTORY

Starting Tuesday, same-sex couples will be able to marry in California. The Desert Sun will cover these unions and the issue leading up to Nov. 4, when voters will consider a constitutional amendment defining marriage as between a man and woman. The Desert Sun would like to hear from everyone, whether getting married or protesting on Tuesday. Visit [mydesert.com](#) to tell us your stories, share an opinion or post your photo albums. You can also visit [mydesert.com/samesexmarriages](#) to check out The Desert Sun's coverage. A head count of gay and lesbian residents is difficult. But most demographers agree that gays account for about a third of Palm Spring's residents.

An Urban Institute study in 2004 found Palm Springs has one of the largest gay communities nationwide.

Formed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1968, the Institute conducts research on social and economic issues to promote public policy and effective government.

Among the report's findings:

The California Supreme Court's decision is final. However, voters could overturn the decision with a state constitutional amendment defining marriage as between one man and one woman on Nov. 4.

Palm Springs, which boasts one of the largest gay populations per capita in the United States, already is a gay destination, with events such as the White Party and Dinah Shore Weekend drawing tens of thousands of party-goers who inject millions into the local economy.

About 3 million people visit the Coachella Valley each year. Valley tourism is a \$3 billion industry.

"Palm Springs has always been the romantic hideaway," Pougnet said. "To me, this is a great opportunity to rebrand ourselves to everyone.

"It's a great place to get married, straight or gay."

At Pougnet's urging, a group of 50 hospitality and wedding business owners met for brainstorming sessions in the weeks after the California Supreme Court decision.

The result?

A party dubbed "A Marriage Celebration," with wedding cake, a DJ and free weddings performed by the mayor and deputized council members, will be held Saturday. The marriage committee also created a Web site - [www.marriedinpalm Springs.com](http://www.marriedinpalm Springs.com) - that is up and running to nationally market Palm Springs to gays and lesbians looking to get hitched.

"The idea is that it's a celebration for all," said Hines, who is promoting the Marriage Celebration - pro-bono.

"This is not just a gay event. We really want to promote the fact that Palm Springs is open for the wedding business."

Palm Springs will offer civil marriage ceremonies beginning Tuesday, the first day gays and lesbians can marry.

Palm Springs City Clerk James Thompson, council members Rick Hutcheson, Ginny Foat and Pougnet - who said several dozen couples have asked him to officiate their wedding - all have been deputized to perform civil ceremonies.

Coachella Valley businesses are lining up to cash in on history. Some, such as the Pastry Swan Bakery in Cathedral City, are already seeing a boon.

"We're definitely getting an overwhelming response on this," said Deborah Quinn, owner of Pastry Swan Bakery.

"We're very glad to get some more business through the summer."

Quinn said she has fielded about three phone calls a day about same-sex wedding cakes since Memorial Day. Her busiest time of year for weddings is May. Typically, couples will call three to four months before the wedding.

Not with the ban on same-sex marriage being lifted Tuesday.

"They call and say they need it in two weeks time," said Les Hook, head cake decorator at the Pastry Swan. "We're gonna be busy."

The Rev. Norman De Armond Jr., owner of Enchanted Wedding Chapel in Palm Springs, has reserved his chapel for same-sex couples in the first days the ban is lifted. He hopes opening marriage up to same-sex couples will mean more business.

"It's the dawn of something new and you don't want to be left out," De Armond said.

In 2004, a government budgetary analysis found a \$1 billion boon to federal coffers over 10 years if same-sex marriage was legalized in all 50 states.

"I think it's a wonderful opportunity for us to generate more visitors to the desert in a need period," said Jeff Beckelman, president and CEO of the Palm Springs Desert Resort Communities Convention and Visitors Authority.

The federal government does not recognize same-sex unions and the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act passed by Congress stipulates no state can be required to.

The General Accounting Office has identified 1,138 federal benefits and rights to civil marriage, none of which gays and lesbians will enjoy.

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Palm Springs the third gayest city in California - behind Guerneville and West Hollywood - and the fifth largest concentration in the nation.

The highest concentration of same-sex couples is in Vermont, California and Washington.

California and Nevada have highest concentration of gay male couples while Vermont and New Mexico have the highest lesbian concentration.

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