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Same-sex nuptials boon to Calif. business

By William M. Welch, USA TODAY

WEST HOLLYWOOD, Calif. — Many California businesses see dollar signs in gay nuptials.

"We're really excited and gearing up for it," says Bill Hynes, vice president of the West Hollywood Marketing and Visitors Bureau.

The state Supreme Court ruling that tossed out the Golden State's ban on same-sex marriage as being unconstitutional has caterers, florists and hotels preparing for a possible big influx of business. Same-sex marriages become legal in California on June 17.

Among the cities readying to cash in is West Hollywood, whose Santa Monica Boulevard is a hub of gay life in the Los Angeles area. San Francisco and Palm Springs, both with substantial gay communities, are also taking steps to cater to the expanded opportunities.

West Hollywood's visitors bureau has placed ads in national gay magazines declaring "West Hollywood is THE place for weddings and honeymoons."

In Palm Springs, an hour and a half east in the desert, Mayor Steve Pougnet has been deputized by Riverside County to perform wedding ceremonies. He's scheduled to tie the knot for a male couple at 8 a.m. the day the ceremonies become legal.

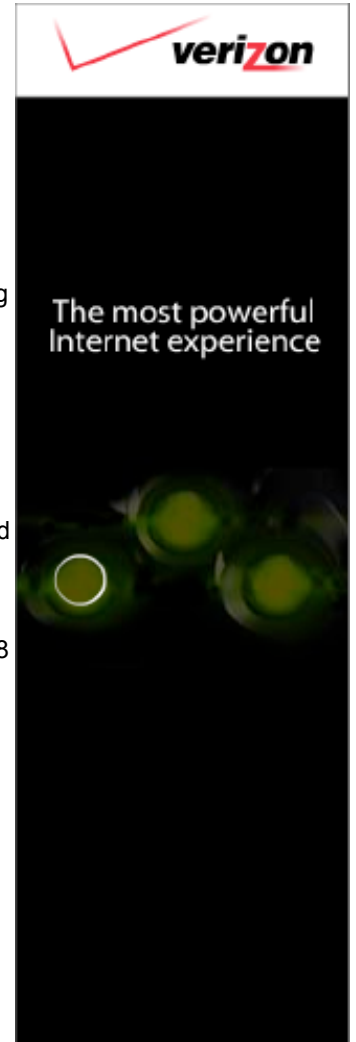
"Certainly it's going to have a huge potential economic impact to the city," he says.

A study prepared by two UCLA law and economics professors, to be released this month, estimates the state's wedding and tourism-related businesses will see an increase of \$683.6 million in direct spending over the next three years by same-sex couples.

Brad Sears, a law professor and one of the authors, said there are more than 102,000 same-sex couples in California. In addition, they estimate more than 67,000 same-sex couples will travel to California to marry.

Michael Petrov, general manager of West Hollywood Florist, said he's expecting more business but

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hasn't seen it yet.

At The Abbey, vice president of marketing Michael Doneff says many gay couples who met at the restaurant have called about holding weddings there.

"It's still a little too soon to see a substantial impact," he said. "A lot of people are starting to adjust to this new reality."

Photographers, florists, jewelers and bakeries see this as a lucky break during an otherwise tough economy, said Sharon Sandow, CEO of the Chamber of Commerce.

Also in Northern California, hotels and resorts are directing ads at gay honeymooners.

Lynette McLean, co-owner of Highlands Resort, which caters to a primarily gay and lesbian clientele in Guerneville in Sonoma County, offers a wedding package for two nights in a cabin in a redwood forest.

She says several couples have booked honeymoons and more have called to plan events later this summer or fall, taking time "to have a more traditional experience."

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