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Sussex celebrates its first civil union

Clerk of Peace puts aside his objections, makes historic first ceremony 'wonderful'



Sussex County Clerk of the Peace George Parish performs the first-ever civil union ceremony in Sussex County for Mary Hudson (left) and Lynn Ekelund, both of Milton.

In the minutes before her historic civil union ceremony in Sussex County on Wednesday, Mary Hudson picked up a bouquet of silk flowers and joked that once the ceremony was complete, she would toss it to her 89-year-old [mother](#), one of two official witnesses to the event.

Hudson and her partner of 10 years, Lynn Ekelund, stood near a white-lattice garden arbor festooned with ivory silk flowers and tulle. A boom box, tucked amid the tulle, played romantic tunes.

"I'm really nervous," said Hudson, 63, of Milton. "We were good 15 minutes ago."

Hudson and Ekelund are the first same-sex couple joined in a civil union in Sussex County since the state law took effect Jan. 1. Sussex County Clerk of the Peace George Parish has two more civil unions planned for this week and three for next week.

Parish stepped out in a black robe and asked the two women to designate someone to hold the legal documents.

"My mother," Hudson said, turning to Cornelia Pruitt, 89, of Seaford.

The event had special meaning for Hudson, Ekelund and Parish.

Politically, Parish has been opposed to same-sex civil unions but said he had two choices once Gov. Jack Markell signed the bill into law: He could abide by the law or he could resign. Parish, a Republican, said he had no intention of resigning and giving Markell, a Democrat, the chance to appoint his replacement. But he said this would be his last year as Sussex County's Clerk of the Peace.

Still, Parish said he wanted to come up with a special ceremony to [help](#) same-sex couples rejoice in and remember their day.

Parish had the couple stand face to face. Then he started by welcoming everyone to "wonderful Sussex County."

The two witnesses, Pruitt and Hudson's cousin, Diane Jefferson, of Milton, sat in the front row. Two print reporters, a radio reporter, a television crew and a print photographer were there to capture the historic moment.

"We are gathered here for the civil union of Lynn and Mary," he said. "Lynn, do you freely, willingly and without reservation ... though we know not what this [journey](#) will bring ..." join Mary in civil union, he asked.

"I do," Ekelund said.

He repeated the same question to Hudson, who held back tears. Ekelund reached out and held her hands.

She, too, said: "I do."

Parish then gave the women a moment to speak.

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