

# Gay South Florida JUNE 26, 2015

## In South Florida, Supreme Court decision on gay marriage amazes many, angers others



In January: Attorney Elizabeth Schwartz, center, joins hands with plaintiffs in the gay marriage ruling on the courthouse steps after the ban was successfully lifted Monday morning Jan.5, 2015 by Judge Sarah Zabel. | **Emily Michot** - Miami Herald File

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Miami attorney Elizabeth Schwartz stood over her computer at 10 a.m. Friday, awaiting word from the U.S. Supreme Court on whether same-sex couples had the right to marry everywhere in the nation. Then came the news: Justices ruled 5-4 in favor of gay and lesbian couples.

"I just started crying. I was standing at my kitchen counter because I couldn't sit. I almost fell down," said Schwartz, one of the lawyers who represented Equality Florida Institute and six same-sex couples who in January 2014 successfully sued Miami-Dade County Clerk Harvey Ruvin to issue them marriage licenses.

Schwartz said she anticipated Friday's Supreme Court decision, "but I didn't expect it would be so emotional. I didn't expect it would be so powerful."

"The powerful words of the Supreme Court are a beacon of light as we move forward into a greater understanding of what it takes for us to truly live up to the promise of equal justice for all," Schwartz said.

LGBT people throughout South Florida cheered Friday's decision.

"To me, I never thought in my lifetime I would see something like this," said Jeff Bloom, 72, a single gay man in Wilton Manors. "They recognized love is love."

Bloom, 72, recalls decades ago when gay men would get arrested in New York City for dancing together and when the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders used by psychologists labeled homosexuality a disease.

Miami attorney Richard Milstein, who with husband Eric Hankin were among eight same-sex couples who successfully sued Florida to recognize their out-of-state marriages, said Friday's decision was the culmination of years of fighting for equality.

"We're thrilled to have been participating, to do a small piece as we moved along, with [gay-rights group] SAVE and the ACLU," Milstein said. "It's been 20 years of working hard for this," he added, referring to passage of the federal Defense of Marriage Act in 1996, which prohibited the federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages and allowed the states to maintain their own anti-gay marriage laws.

Florida voters passed a constitutional ban against gay marriage in 2008. A federal judge in Tallahassee declared the law unconstitutional, as did five state judges in Monroe, Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties.

Anthony Verdugo, executive director the the Christian Family Coalition in South Florida, blamed lawyers and judges for ignoring millions of votes against same-sex marriage throughout the United States.

“I felt very sad for the American people,” Verdugo said upon hearing the Supreme Court ruling. “This decision was handed down by five lawyers. What these five corrupt lawyers basically did was to violate the constitutional voter rights of 50 million Americans who decided this at the ballot box: To constitutionally respect marriage as the union of one husband and one wife.”

Verdugo called the decision “illegitimate and unacceptable.”

“We will not accept the decision. It won’t be acknowledged and recognized,” he said. “We would not accept it in areas of employment. We would not recognize it in areas of housing. We would not recognize it in areas of communication. It’s judicial tyranny at its worst.”

Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski issued a statement saying that the ruling was “disappointing if not unexpected. As the minority of the judges said in their dissent, ‘The majority’s decision is an act of will, not legal judgment.’”

Attorney Schwartz said those who oppose same-sex marriage must move on.

“People have to adjust to a world in which it’s not same-sex marriage, it’s just marriage,” Schwartz said. “I think of all the indignities my clients and friends have suffered and how it might have been different if we lived in a world where gay and lesbian relationships were acknowledged as legitimate. There’s a power in a nation saying that gays and lesbians are worthy of equal protection under the law.”

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