

# Peaceful protest marks anniversary of gay marriage ban

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**ST. LOUIS** - Erick Semenske and Tim Coleman joined hands Wednesday, then walked into a City Hall office and asked for a marriage license.

A clerk politely directed them to another office where they could register as domestic partners, and Recorder of Deeds Sharon Carpenter then met Semenske, 25, and Coleman, 35, in the hallway and explained why the marriage license couldn't be issued.

"It's the law," Carpenter said. "We must follow it."

Their request was intended as a peaceful protest of a constitutional amendment passed one year ago. The St. Louis couple and some other gay and lesbian partners across the state planned to apply for marriage licenses on the anniversary of Amendment 2, which defined marriage in Missouri as being only between a man and a woman.

The two said they were simply seeking the same rights as a married heterosexual couple. They continued to hope Missouri will recognize same-sex marriages and allow them custody, inheritance, medical and other rights the same as what married couples have.

At an afternoon rally, only a handful of supporters turned out to support the protest. Meanwhile, one gay organization opposed the action, feeling it could harm other efforts for gay rights.

"In our opinion, it's going to do nothing but drive resentment and hate toward the gay and lesbian community," said Charles Stadtlander, president of the St. Louis chapter of the Log Cabin Republicans, a national gay Republican group.

The constitutional amendment had strong support among state legislators, and it was approved by more than 70 percent of Missouri voters. With opposition that strong, it doesn't make sense to continue to fight for gay marriage in Missouri, Stadtlander said.

Instead, the Log Cabin Republicans will work for introduction of a bill allowing for civil unions in Missouri, which would afford gay people the same legal rights as a married couple.

"The ultimate goal is equal rights," Stadtlander said.

State Sen. Kevin Engler, R-Farmington, who sponsored the marriage legislation in the House when he was a representative, said voters' support of Amendment 2 made it clear the vast majority of Missourians don't think marriage was intended for same-sex couples.

He said Wednesday's attempt to get a marriage license got attention. "As far as changing people's minds, I don't think it has changed anything," he said.

Semenske said he couldn't see shifting his position to fight for civil unions or to register as domestic partners. "I consider that second-class citizenship, back of the bus treatment. I won't take anything less than marriage," he said.

Semenske and Coleman have been together five years. Semenske proposed Thursday at MoKaBe's Coffeehouse in the city, getting down on one knee to offer Coleman a ring as other diners broke into applause.

Coleman said without a chance to marry, he felt they weren't being afforded the same opportunities as other Americans.

"You want to be a team. You want to work together to build your life," he said.