



# We Are Family

Issue Number 4

Date: May 2009

## PRIDE Festival Family Activity Zone

Thanks to everybody who volunteered for the Prize Festival Family Activity Zone. We had a great showing for the first year. We provided arts and crafts, reading materials, and a balloon artist/face painter for about 75 children. A special thanks to our members who volunteered for the event and to SNAPI for their donations.

For those of you who made it to the event, you may remember the great services provided by Balloons with a Twist. To learn more about their services, visit [www.balloonswithatwist.com](http://www.balloonswithatwist.com). They have balloon artists, face painters, magicians, costume characters, caricature artists, stilt-walkers, princesses, bounce houses, food carts, photographers, videographers, petting zoos, exotic animals, balloon decor, and more!

### Check the Website Out!

[www.WeAreFamilyLV.org](http://www.WeAreFamilyLV.org)

Learn about:

- ✓ Calendar of Events
- ✓ Community Links
- ✓ Workshop Information
- ✓ Bio's of Members
- ✓ Past and Present Newsletters

If you are interested in sharing your story with the We Are Family members, send us your bio at [brian@wearefamilylv.org](mailto:brian@wearefamilylv.org).

If you are interested in submitting columns for the monthly newsletter or have ideas for improving the newsletter email us at [brian@wearefamilylv.org](mailto:brian@wearefamilylv.org)

### Upcoming May Events

#### Semi-Annual Planning Meeting

**When:** Tuesday, May 12, 6:00 – 8:00pm

**Where:** The Gay and Lesbian Community Center at 953 E. Sahara Ave., B-31,

**Why:** Get to know the members of We Are Family. We will be voting on dept. head positions.

**Who:** All members

**RSVP:** For more information and to receive an Evite to this event please email [adele@wearefamilylv.org](mailto:adele@wearefamilylv.org).

#### Solar Cooking

**When:** Saturday, May 16, 1:30 – 3:30pm  
Meeting @ 1pm in front of class

**Where:** The Springs Preserve

**Why:** Learn how easy it is to make food with Solar Cookers.

**Who:** All members, especially children.

**RSVP:** For more information and to receive an Evite please email us at [adele@wearefamilylv.org](mailto:adele@wearefamilylv.org).

#### Las Vegas Helldorado Days

##### 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Schedule of Events

**Thursday May 14** – Carnival/Rodeo

5:00pm – 11:00, downtown rodeo grounds.

**Friday May 15** – Carnival/Rodeo,

5:00pm – 12:00, downtown rodeo grounds

**Saturday, May 16** – Parade,

7:00pm – 9:00pm downtown Las Vegas,  
4<sup>th</sup> street to Ogden

**For more information:**

[www.elkshelldorado.com](http://www.elkshelldorado.com)

#### To learn more

[www.wearefamilylv.org](http://www.wearefamilylv.org)

#### Contact

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#### Planning Members

Tara Newberry

Brian Eagan



## **Domestic Partners in Nevada See Hope By Molly Ball, Las Vegas Review Journal (4/26/2009)**

Holly Carratelli has been with her partner since 1994. They have two small children. They spend their days getting the kids to school and picking them up, making sure they do their homework, taking them to gymnastics and Cub Scouts.

But Holly and Susan Carratelli also spend more time than the average couple worrying what would happen if one of them were to die or leave, dark thoughts that don't haunt your average happy household.

"We have easily spent \$10,000 on attorney's fees to define our relationship," said Holly Carratelli, a native Las Vegas who owns a medical billing business.

"We've gone through so much legal paperwork to secure our rights and our family's well-being. But still, if I died, I don't know if the coroner would give her information or release my body to her. It's awful to have to wonder what would happen to our kids. She has legal guardianship, but it's null and void upon my death."

The Carratellis are among the many gay couples anxiously watching the legislative debate on domestic partnerships. Last week, the state Senate approved a bill that would allow Nevadans, gay and straight alike, to register their partnerships with the state and be afforded most of the same rights and responsibilities the state gives to spouses.

Opponents argue that the bill would allow same-sex marriages in all but name.

They say the state constitution defines marriage as between a man and a woman. By creating a marriage-like institution for people of the same sex, the domestic partnership bill would subvert the will of voters who approved the marriage amendment in 2000 and 2002.

"Just because you say something isn't something else doesn't mean that it isn't," said Richard Ziser, chairman of the "values voters" group Nevada Concerned Citizens

and the driving force behind the constitutional amendment.

Creating an institution that is functionally the same as marriage but called something else is still redefining marriage, Ziser said, drawing an analogy.

"Slavery is illegal, but maybe because the economy's so bad you want to create something called 'economic recovery laborers' and bring people from overseas to work for free. That's slavery. You can't just change the term."

The American Civil Liberties Union of Nevada, which supports the domestic partnership bill, disagrees.

"Overall, this is a huge step in recognizing the equal rights and equal dignity of every person in Nevada, but what it won't do is replicate marriage," said ACLU attorney Lee Rowland. "That can't be done in Nevada."

Under the proposed legislation, those wishing to form domestic partnerships would register with the secretary of state's office.

The bill, Senate Bill 283, states, "Domestic partners have the same rights, protections and benefits, and are subject to the same responsibilities, obligations and duties under law ... as are granted to and imposed upon spouses."

That would mean, for example, that one partner couldn't be forced to testify in court against the other; when a partner died, the other would automatically receive their personal effects. Partners would be responsible for each other's debts and would divide their property, in the event of a separation, the same way divorcing couples do.

Employers, whether public or private, would not be required to offer the same benefits to domestic partners that they do to spouses. That would remain up to the employers, as is the case now.

Some governments and companies, such as Harrah's and the city of Las Vegas, offer such benefits; others, such as the state's higher education system, do not.

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[brian@wearefamilylv.org](mailto:brian@wearefamilylv.org)

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In addition, the hundreds of federal rights that come with marriage wouldn't come with domestic partnership registration. Partners couldn't file joint federal tax returns, but neither can couples in states that allow gay marriage.

None of the rights partners would be granted in Nevada would extend across the state's borders.

"It's definitely a second-class (arrangement); it's definitely not marriage," said Nicole Harvey, a Sparks attorney who married her partner in California last year but relies on a thick stack of legal papers to define their relationship in Nevada.

"It would create a registry and make it so you don't have to draw up all these separate contracts for things like powers of attorney and authorizations for burial. But it's not marriage. I wish it was. I don't want a domestic partner; I want a spouse."

Proponents of Question 2, the Nevada marriage amendment, touted its simplicity as part of its appeal. It was only 18 words long: "Only a marriage between a male and female person shall be recognized and given effect in this state."

Ziser and others argued at the time that the amendment was needed so that if other states legalized gay marriages, Nevada wouldn't recognize them.

In coming out in favor of the amendment, the state's Catholic bishops said it "would best preserve the definition of marriage held by the Catholic Church," but added that they might support legislation giving rights to those in same-sex unions.

"Marriage carries a religious connotation: You did it in the eyes of God, in a wedding," Holly Carratelli said. "Going to the secretary of state's office to declare you're living together -- there's nothing in the Bible about that. There's nothing very pretty about it."

The Legislative Counsel Bureau issued an opinion last week that the partnership bill wouldn't violate the constitutional amendment. The amendment "refers only to marriages; it does not refer to domestic partnerships, civil unions, reciprocal

beneficiary agreements or anything else that might be said to be 'marriage-like' but not, in fact, a marriage," the opinion states.

"If the proponents of the ballot question ... had intended for the provisions thereof to apply not just to marriages, per se, but also to other 'marriage-like' social or contractual unions -- they could easily have so provided. But they did not do so," according to the counsel bureau opinion.

Nevada would become the 10th state to grant status to domestic partnerships or civil unions. Twenty-nine states have constitutional amendments banning gay marriage; but some of them, such as Oregon and California, allow domestic partnerships at the same time.

Nevada's debate over partnerships comes at a time when gay marriage is in the national spotlight. In recent weeks, the Iowa Supreme Court and the Vermont legislature legalized gay marriage in those states, while the Miss USA runner-up from California caused controversy at the contest in Las Vegas when she opined that only "opposite marriage" should be allowed.

The National Organization for Marriage, a nonprofit group that backed last year's successful initiative to ban gay marriage in California, this month began airing an ad, "Gathering Storm," featuring actors describing the threat posed by same-sex marriage.

But the group's activism is confined to protecting "marriage as the union of a husband and wife," as its Web site puts it. Asked whether the group is concerned about domestic partnerships, its executive director, Brian Brown, said last week, "Our organization's sole focus is on the marriage issue and protecting marriage."

Chris Edelson, state legislative director for the Human Rights Campaign based in Washington, D.C., said groups like that one are relying on "scare tactics" at a time when the momentum favors gay marriage.

"It's been happening for five years in Massachusetts, and the world didn't come to an end," he said.



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"Predictions were made that it would end traditional marriage, and that didn't happen. People have important things to be concerned about, like the economy, and they're not as worried about gay and lesbian couples getting married."

Republicans such as John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign manager, Steve Schmidt, have come out in favor of gay marriage recently, while the Republican governor of Utah, Jon Huntsman, supports civil unions for same-sex couples. Huntsman also is a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In light of such developments, "I don't think it's as much of a partisan issue recently," Edelson said. "People are realizing that gay and lesbian couples want the same things as straight couples: to live their lives quietly and protect their families."

Ziser, of Nevada Concerned Citizens, said people can create whatever kind of partnership they want through legal contracts. That doesn't mean the state should officially recognize their relationships as a category.

"It's based on the moral argument that the state recognizing those relationships, something similar to marriage, between people of the same sex, is giving state-authorized moral equivalence to a homosexual relationship versus a heterosexual relationship," Ziser said. "It ends up being used to violate the religious liberties of what we believe to be a majority of Americans, who believe there's a moral, religious definition of marriage."

The Nevada bill passed the state Senate last week by a 12-9 vote that wasn't quite party-line. Two Democrats voted against it, while two Republicans voted for it.

The next step is for it to be heard in the Assembly, where no hearing has yet been scheduled. If it passes, it would go to Gov. Jim Gibbons, who has said he would veto it.

Gibbons spokesman Daniel Burns said last week that the governor's objection to the bill is on libertarian grounds.

"His position is pretty simple," Burns said. "He does not believe government should be involved in people's medicine cabinets or their bedrooms; therefore he does not support the legislation."

If the bill came before Gibbons today, he would veto it, but he is still willing to listen to others' views, Burns said.

The bill's sponsor, state Sen. David Parks, is the first and only openly gay Nevada legislator. Parks, D-Las Vegas, hopes that if Gibbons vetoes the bill, the Legislature could override the veto. That would take 14 votes in the state Senate, 28 in the Assembly.

For Holly Carratelli, it's an exciting possibility. The 47-year-old is the biological parent of the two children and took her partner's last name so the family would all have the same name.

In 2007, Carratelli, diagnosed with renal cancer, underwent surgery to have a kidney removed. Before she checked in for the procedure, she and her partner went to a lawyer to have medical powers of attorney assigned.

"Fortunately, the hospital honored it," she said. "But most people just have to show their wedding rings."

### Other Las Vegas Resources

Clark County Family Services

[www.accessclarkcounty.com](http://www.accessclarkcounty.com)

The Gay and Lesbian Center of Southern Nevada

[www.thecenterlv.com](http://www.thecenterlv.com)

PFLAG

[pflag@viawest.net](mailto:pflag@viawest.net) or (702) 738-7838