

# P'town celebrates same-sex milestone

■ Longtime partners become 1,000th couple to file for marriage.

By ERIC WILLIAMS  
STAFF WRITER

PROVINCETOWN — John Culver and Peter Warnock walked into Provincetown Town Hall yesterday afternoon and made a beeline to the town clerk's office to file their intention to marry.

They were the 1,000th same-sex couple to file in Provincetown since May 17, 2004, when same-sex marriages became legal in the Bay State. The event touched off a Norman Rockwell-like hubbub in the town hall, where employees, who had been waiting for the 1,000th couple to arrive, poured into the hallway to catch a glimpse of the new celebrities.

All of a sudden, balloons and selectmen were everywhere. But Town Clerk Doug Johnstone had ushered the happy couple into a quiet meeting room, where there were important forms to fill out.

Warnock and Culver were told there was a prize package involved. "I've already won the prize," said Warnock, looking at Culver.

They have been together for about 10 years and own a home in Provincetown. Culver, 49, who has 11 brothers and sisters, is a registered nurse at the town-owned nursing home.

Warnock, 47, is a waiter at Chach, a Provincetown restaurant. The men are planning an August wedding, either in Provincetown or Marblehead. Neither has been married before.

And who takes whose name?

"I'll probably take Culver," said Warnock.

"We were playing around with the idea that I would take his name and he would take mine," said Culver. "Just for something different."

Warnock said the couple had been hoping to be the 1,000th intent filers, and had kept track of the count at town hall.

Town Clerk Johnstone said his office doesn't track how many of the 1,000 same-sex couples were male or



ERIC WILLIAMS/Cape Cod Times

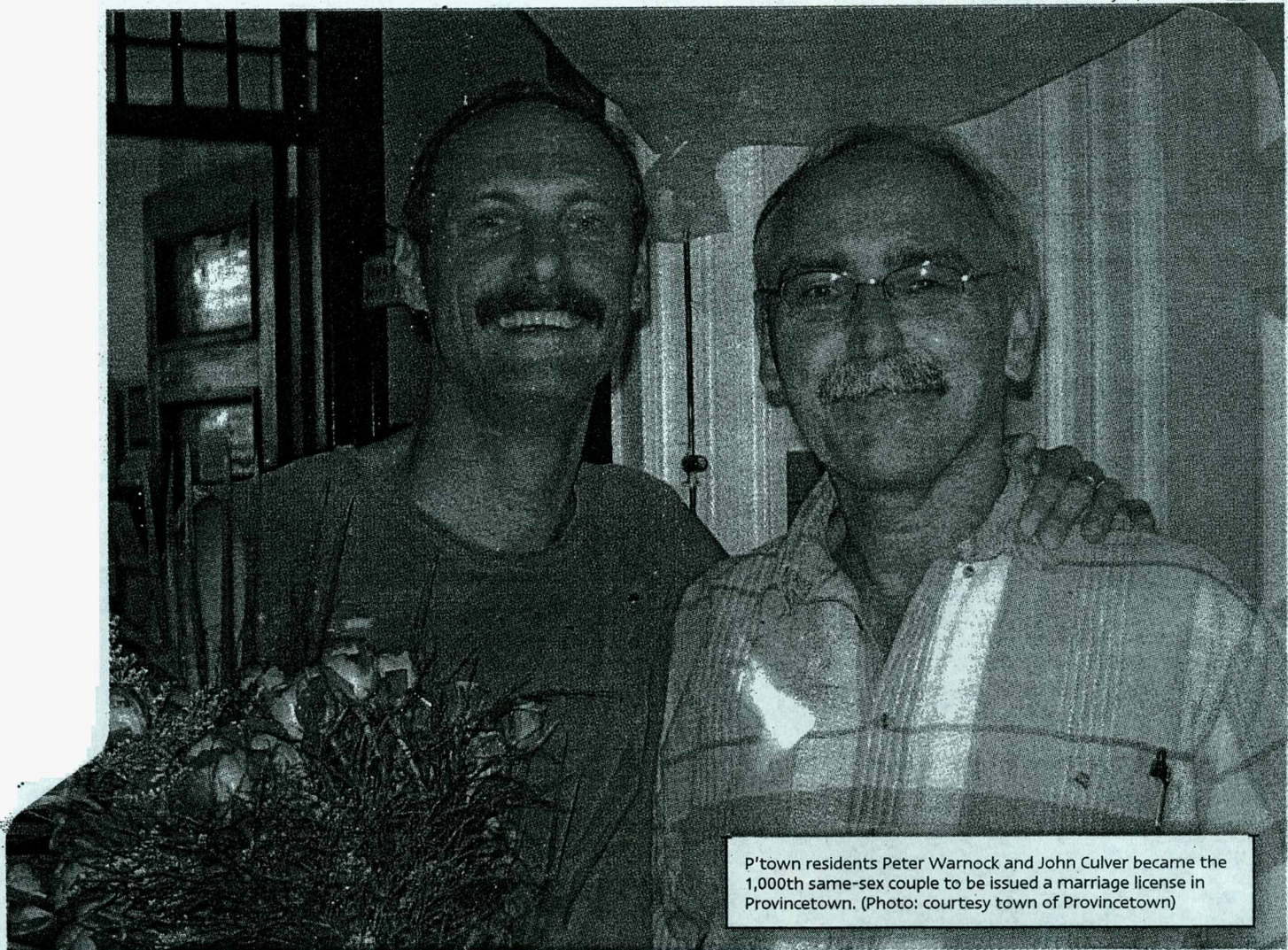
Peter Warnock, left, and John Culver are planning an August wedding.

female, and noted that not everyone who files an intent to marry form ends up getting married. He said that while the pace of same-sex marriage filers had slowed from last year to this year, there was still a steady flow of same-sex couples stepping up to his counter.

"Provincetown is far in the lead," said Carissa Cunningham, spokeswoman for Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD)."

Information from the state Registry of Vital Records and Statistics, tracking the preliminary number of marriage certificates issued and registered in Massachusetts from May 17, 2004 to Dec. 31, 2004, place Provincetown in the lead with 865 marriage certificates. Other communities at the top of the list: Cambridge (553), Boston (455) and Northampton (316).

Eric Williams can be reached at ewilliams@capecodonline.com.



P'town residents Peter Warnock and John Culver became the 1,000th same-sex couple to be issued a marriage license in Provincetown. (Photo: courtesy town of Provincetown)

**MARRIAGE** STEPHEN DESROCHES

# THE 1,000TH P'TOWN GAY WEDDING

**ON FRIDAY, JUNE 24, PETER**

**WARNOCK AND JOHN CULVER**

**WALKED INTO TOWN HALL FOR A**

**MARRIAGE LICENSE; THEY WALKED**

**OUT WITH A MAJOR PARTY**

You might have thought that they were the one-millionth customer at a grocery store or that folks in Provincetown were celebrating New Year's Eve early, but when P'town residents Peter Warnock and John Culver walked into Town Hall on Friday, June 24, they became the 1,000th same-sex couple to be issued a marriage license in Provincetown and the party began.

The couple had been watching the counter on Provincetown's Web site and decided to time their application to try and be couple 1,000. When they were and found out that they won a special prize package, those in attendance heard Warnock say, "I already won the prize" as he grabbed Culver's hand.

The couple has been together for 10 years. Warnock is a waiter at a diner in Provincetown, and Culver is a registered nurse. The couple is planning to get married in August.

When Culver and Warnock approached the town clerk's office, all of the Town Hall's workers ran from their desks, ready to celebrate something they have been waiting months for.

When the count hit 800 sometime around April, Provincetown prepared for a celebration they thought might happen by Memorial Day. But the balloons and confetti secured to the ceiling would have to wait. Town Clerk Doug Johnstone noted that the number of couples applying to get married has slowed compared with last year, a slowdown that was expected. But the wait for couple 1,000 was akin to a kid waiting for Christmas. Earlier this week, when the number hit 995, everyone knew this landmark day was coming sooner rather than later.

"We are all just elated," said Provincetown Selectman Richard Olson. "And we are doubly pleased that the couple is from Provincetown. It just makes it that much more special."

Since same-sex marriage became legal in Massachusetts in May 2004, couples from all over the country have come to Provincetown to get married. And despite conflicts with the governor and attorney general over an archaic law that bars couples from out of state getting marriage licenses, Provincetown continues to issue the licenses. In fact, more than 50 percent of marriage licenses given to same-sex couples were to those from out of state.

Provincetown has issued more marriage licenses to same-sex couples than any other municipality in the commonwealth. The 1,000 licenses given to gay and lesbian couples account for 15 percent of all licenses given to same-sex couples in the state. The next closest municipalities are Cambridge, Boston

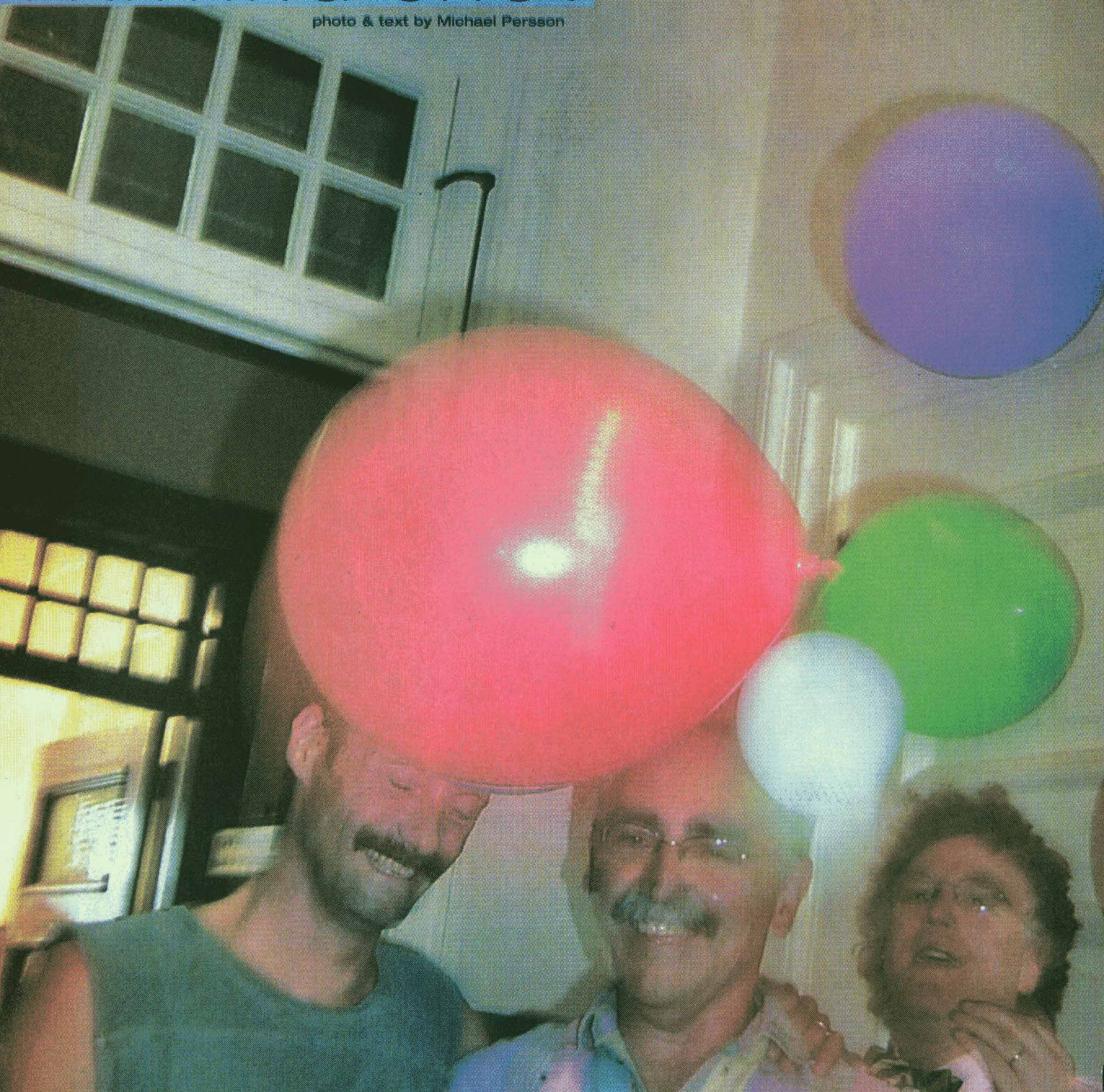
and Northampton. According to statistics, as of December 2004, Cambridge had issued 553 licenses, Boston 455 and the popular lesbian enclave of Northampton had give out 316.

Indeed, the legalization of same-sex marriage has become an important part of Provincetown's economy. Several restaurants and catering companies saw business go through the roof starting May 17, 2004, the day same-sex marriage became legal. Now, pedicabs with tin cans and "Just Married" signs with a smiling couple inside are commonplace in P'town. In fact, same-sex marriages have become so common that people forget heterosexual couples get married here, too. Usually, Provincetown issues about 25 to 30 marriage licenses to opposite-sex couples. But the sight of a man and a woman getting married in P'town is apparently enough to make people do a double take. Last weekend, a crowd gathered outside the Unitarian Universalist Church as a bagpipe player led a wedding party out onto the lawn. When the crowd noticed that it was a man and a woman that had been married, several people looked at each other confusedly, and one woman quipped, "That looks kind of strange in this town, doesn't it? A man and a woman getting married."

Provincetown shows no signs of slowing down, as by the end of the workday on Friday, they issued four more licenses, bringing the total to 1,004. •

# PARTING SHOT

photo & text by Michael Persson



John Culver (L) and Peter Warnock became the 1000th same-sex marriage to be performed in Provincetown June 24th, 2005. A year and a month and one week ago since same-sex marriages were permitted within the State of Massachusetts, the Provincetown couple took the plunge and were greeted by town officials (Town Manager, Keith Bergman far right.) and all the fanfare. Culver and Warnock were given the key to the Town by the Board of Selectman, a gift hamper and a quick rendition of "Going to the Chapel" performed by Patricia Fitzpatrick. The two described themselves as feeling "overwhelmed" by the occasion and planned to celebrate by doing what they always do: staying at home and cooking dinner.

# Memo

**To:** Keith A Bergman  
**From:** Doug Johnstone, Town Clerk  
**Date:** 1/12/2005  
**Re:** 1,000<sup>th</sup> Same Sex Marriage Intention Filing Plans

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As of today, 928 same sex couples have filed their marriage intentions since May 17, 2004. While it is difficult to know the exact date that the 1,000<sup>th</sup> same sex couple will come through our door to file, it is anticipated that the event could occur anywhere from late March to early May, depending on the volume between now and then. Certainly as the intention filings increase we will have a better indication of when the event will occur. The following plans have been conceived for your information and input:

- A pre-Press Release to announce that Provincetown is nearing the 1,000<sup>th</sup> same sex marriage filing to local newspapers (Banner, Cape Cod Times, Cape Codder), and also to larger media outlets that may be receptive to the information.
- A balloon and confetti drop on the couple once they complete their intention filing at the Town Clerk counter.
- A bouquet of flowers for each half of the couple (will work on getting these donated).
- A specially wrapped gift that a couple from San Francisco who filed their intentions and married here in October sent to commemorate the 1,000<sup>th</sup> same sex couple (two pins with a type of translucent stone, the clasp of which was invented and patented by the couple).
- A congratulatory scroll from the Board of Selectmen. This could be enlarged and reproduced on parchment and tied with an elaborate ribbon.
- A key to the Town (the gold keys with the embedded town seal that have been given in the past). Both scroll and key, if approved by the Selectmen, could be presented by one or more selectmen, if they are available on short

notice, if not, then by their designated representative or highest available Town Employee (ideally the Town Manager).

- Tourism Director Patricia Fitzpatrick suggested that I contact the newly organized Provincetown Retailers Association to solicit a gift basket that they could present to the couple. Finance Committee member Mark Leach and Visitor Services Board member Ellen Freeman are the co-chairs of this new organization. Since they are a new organization they might welcome the publicity, and it would be another item that we could provide to celebrate the couple without cost to the Town. If this option is pursued I would also suggest that the Provincetown Retailers Association provide the floral bouquets, as a florist may be included in their membership.

The idea is to have the 1,000 couple escorted to the Judge Welsh Room to file their intentions (as is current practice), without them being aware that they are the 1,000<sup>th</sup> couple. In the 10 – 15 minutes it takes them to file, we could alert the local press, already on stand-by, and any Town Hall staff/board members to gather at the Town Clerk counter. If need be, I could keep the couple in the Judge Welsh Room a bit longer explaining the process while details are put in place, but would prefer that we be considerate of the couple and not extend their time in Town Hall unnecessarily. With careful planning we could maintain the surprise aspect of the event and also get local coverage, but that will mean that some people will need to be available on very short notice.

I welcome your input on these ideas and the opportunity to follow-up with both you and the Selectmen regarding all aspects of the celebratory event.

Look forward to hearing from you so that we can finalize the details.

Thank you.

To: Provincetown Banner

## Letter of Thanks

The Provincetown Town Clerk's Office would like to thank the following businesses for providing gift certificates and fabulous items for a gift basket presented to the lucky 1,000 same sex marriage intention filing couple: Aanraku Stained Glass, Blu Day Spa, Christina's, Eclectiques, Fanizzi's By The Sea, Forbidden Fruits, Hersheldon's Leather, Kennedy Studios, Lyman-Eyer Gallery, Now Voyager Bookstore, Provincetown Florist, Remembrances of Things Past, and Tailwaggers. Your generous donations and thoughtfulness in honor of this historic milestone are greatly appreciated.

Doug Johnstone  
Town Clerk