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Local gay couple wed in San Francisco

By Beth Lipoff, Staff Writer

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Nine years ago, Jewish Kansans Dave Greenbaum and Mike Silverman formally declared their commitment to each other in a Jewish ceremony in Omaha, Neb. On Tuesday, the two men formally married in San Francisco, joining hundreds of same-sex couples taking advantage of California's new decision to allow gay marriage.

"We made a promise and had it written in our ketubah that we would seek any legal recognition of our union when it became available, and this is the first time it's been available to us," said Silverman in a phone interview Monday.

The couple, who live together in Lawrence, first heard about the change in California law about a month ago while watching the news. Silverman immediately booked California-bound airline tickets.

"When Pharaoh gave us the freedom to leave Egypt, we left right away, and when we were given the freedom to marry, we ran toward it just like the Jews from Egypt," Greenbaum said. "We've been waiting nine years for it, and we weren't going to wait a moment longer."

Although the ceremony itself had to be cut and dried, due to the deluge of same-sex couples looking to take advantage of the opportunity to get married, Silverman and Greenbaum decided to add a few of their own touches to the day.

The two planned to wear University of Kansas T-shirts — Silverman in a basketball-championship number and Greenbaum in a KU Hillel shirt that spells out "Kansas" in Hebrew letters.

"Anyone who comes up to me tomorrow and knows it spells Kansas will get the first interview," Greenbaum said.

They also planned to celebrate the moment by saying the Shehechyanu prayer as soon as the ceremony concluded. No family or friends joined them this time, but everyone celebrated at their Jewish ceremony in 1999.

Response from friends and colleagues this time around has also been positive. "All of our various friends and colleagues at work — they're all excited for us that the opportunity has come up. It's been a nice outpouring of support," Silverman said.

Making their path

When they decided to have a Jewish ceremony to celebrate their couplehood back in 1999, Greenbaum and Silverman did some trailblazing.

"We didn't know of any other (gay) couples that had a ketubah. We had written it from scratch, based on traditional legal text," Greenbaum said.

They had some difficulty finding a scribe to write out the ketubah in Hebrew, but eventually found one in Canada, so that they could "make a public statement to the community that we will be seen as a couple in Judaism," Greenbaum said.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis of the Reform movement has officially supported giving gay couples the same rights as heterosexual couples in civil marriage since 1996. The Conservative movement has permitted same-sex



Silverman (left) and Greenbaum, shown here with Silverman's grandmother, had a Jewish ceremony in 1999.



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commitment ceremonies since 2006.

In addition to giving Silverman and Greenbaum's union legal recognition in California (but not in Kansas or Missouri, whose constitutions have amendments forbidding it), Tuesday's civil ceremony served to open up options for their future.

"The state of Israel will recognize gay marriages from other parts of the world. We're hoping that since Israel would recognize it, should we ever make aliyah," Greenbaum said. "Because we are not legally married in the United States, that would make aliyah more difficult. After tomorrow, we'll be seen as a couple."

They don't have immediate plans to make any sort of move, but they like the security the marriage provides, in case they choose to make aliyah in the future.

"I think it's always in the back of your mind. That's the purpose of the state of Israel — to always make sure there's a place for Jews in the world," Silverman said.

They hope that even though Kansas will not recognize their union legally, others will respect it.

"God forbid if I were ill and in the hospital, and Mike wanted to visit me, and only family was allowed, we'd hope a doctor, while not legally required, that he or she would allow me to see my loving companion so that he could take care of me," Greenbaum said.

For now, they're just enjoying the opportunity. After being interviewed by ABC News for "Nightline" and for the local evening news last weekend, the couple married at 9:05 a.m. Tuesday morning — just under two weeks after their nine-year anniversary.

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