



Over 70 attended a wedding in Connecticut celebrating the legal marriage of three local couples. Eleven couples renewed their wedding vows as part of the celebration. The newlyweds (L-R): Judith Gallagher (seated) & Patricia Meilinger (standing), Jim Stevenson-Mathews (seated) & Gaitley Stevenson-Mathews (to his right), Paul Haywood (seated) & Thomas Motz (standing). Clergy, family and friends are gathered behind the couples.

## Three Local Couples Married in Connecticut

### *Neighbors and Friends Renew Vows*

Glen Cove (Long Island) On the morning of Friday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, several residents from Glen Cove and the surrounding area met in the parking lot of First Presbyterian Church to carpool to the Port Jefferson Ferry Terminal. The ultimate goal was to arrive in Bridgeport, Connecticut by noon for a wedding honoring three local couples. Those gathered were friends, neighbors and family joining Gaitley and Jim Stevenson-Mathews, Judith Gallagher and Patricia Meilinger, and Thomas Motz and Paul Haywood – the couples to be wed. Gaitley and Jim and Judith and Patricia are residents of Glen Cove and Thomas and Paul are residents of Patchogue. Over 70 guests attended the celebration overlooking the Long Island Sound. “It was a perfect day filled with love and commitment and joy,” commented Glen Cove resident Gail Allan.

While Gaitley and Jim have been together for eight years and had a religious marriage in May of 2005 and Judith and Patricia have been together for more than 22 years and had a civil union in July of the same year, their marriages were not considered legal under New York State law. Paul and Tom are planning a religious service for 2011, however, wanted to go ahead and be legal joined in marriage along with their friends in order to secure the protections afforded other married couples.

One of the grooms, Gaitley Stevenson-Mathews, explained that gay marriage is

not currently legal in New York State. However, according to a 2008 ruling, legal same-sex marriages performed in other jurisdictions are entitled to recognition in New York. “Our choices were to travel to Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Iowa, or Washington, D.C., and we all chose Bridgeport so that family and friends could more easily join us.”

Given that this past Friday’s celebration was an “extra” wedding ceremony the couples decided to invite other friends already married to join with them by renewing their vows. Those joining the couples in renewing their vows included Lance and Sue Cheney, Revs. Betsy and Joe Simpson, Eleanor and Pete Rapelje, Hon. Charles and Ronnie Lavine, Vincent Gattorno and John Bartul, Tom and Carolyn Willson, Rabbi Judith and Michael Cohen-Rosenburg, Thom and Valerie Ruckert, Rev. Debra Given and Tom Philips, David and Lois Goldberg, and Dennis and Barbara D’Andrea. “We know all three couples and it was an honor to renew our vows with them,” explained Eleanor Rapelje who will be celebrating her 54<sup>th</sup> anniversary with her husband Peter this summer. Mrs. Rapelje was also noted as one of two best women along with local poet Evelyn Kandel. Local designers and friends of all three couples, Dean Yoder and Jonathan Dean, served as Best Men.

Readers and clergy assisting with the service included Rev. Dennis Carter, Carolanne Curry, Rabbi Judith Cohen-Rosenberg, Rev. Bonnie Jean Giebfried, Rev. Debra Given, Rev. Donna Ives,

Father Joseph Krasinski, Valerie Michelesen, Rev. Betsy Simpson, and Rev. Robert Stuart. While the three couples getting married are members of Glen Cove’s First Presbyterian Church, there were several couples from other faiths and denominations involved renewing their vows. For this reason, the couples getting married invited clergy from other faith to participate in the service. “It was unique and moving to have so many faiths represented in one marriage ceremony,” stated Rev. Betsy Simpson, pastor of Glen Cove’s First Presbyterian Church.

Friends of the recently wed couples and the couples who renewed their vows are invited to an informal reception in their honor this Sunday afternoon, May 16<sup>th</sup>, from 2:30 – 4:00 pm. The reception will be held at Mistretta Gallery located at 435 Forest Avenue and will include a photographic exhibit titled “A Tale of Two Weddings x3.” The title acknowledges not only the legal celebration of marriage held on May 7<sup>th</sup>, but also the earlier religious celebrations held when the couples’ marriages were not legally recognized under state law. Honored guests at the reception will include Rabbi Judith Cohen-Rosenburg, Melisa and Alan Geller, Cantor Gastavo and Gaby Gitlin, Mayor Bruce and Robin Kennedy, Assemblyman Charles and Ronnie Lavine, Don Mistretta, Revs. Betsy and Joe Simpson, Mayor Ralph and Jane Beckhard Suozzi, Rev. Robert Stuart, Rev. S. Bruce and Sylvia Wagner and Minority Leader Diane Yatauro. The event is underwritten in part by the Brooke Jackman Foundation and Petals Floral and Party Design.