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Seattle parade marries pride and politics

By Susan Kelleher
Seattle Times staff reporter

Jenifer Salter's partner of 15 years felt well enough Sunday to leave her Belltown apartment to soak up the sun and the dance beats blaring from a passing float at the Seattle Pride Parade.

She stayed only briefly — multiple sclerosis and a movement disorder have kept her housebound — but the foray left Salter hopeful her partner finally might be well enough to go with her to Seattle City Hall this week to register as domestic partners.

"We want to get married here, and I hope we'll be able to do that soon," said Salter, 36, an artist.

"My father's been married seven times," she said. "I just want to do it once."

Along the parade route, which stretched along Fourth Avenue from Union Street to Seattle Center, spectators spoke of their support for marriage laws that would grant to same-sex couples the legal rights now enjoyed by married heterosexuals.

"It's one of the last populations we keep denying rights to," said Leslie Moughty, 32, of Bothell, who rallied about 20 parishioners to march in the parade under the banner of their church, the Northshore United Church of Christ in Woodinville.

Moughty and her mother, Chris Yager, 62, said they marched as people of faith to underscore their belief that moral judgments about sexual orientation have no place in deciding legal questions about equality among people.

To that end, they have joined a coalition working to keep off the ballot this fall a referendum that would repeal a domestic-partnership law enacted last spring. The bill, passed in the Legislature and signed by Gov. Chris Gregoire, expanded the state's domestic-partnership law and extended marriagelike benefits to same-sex couples who register as domestic partners.



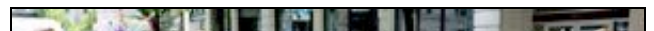
DANIEL HOUGHTON / THE SEATTLE TIMES
A participant waves to the crowd as the Seattle Pride Parade passes through downtown. Thousands cheered nearly 200 groups that took part.



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Members of the Greater Seattle Business Association carry briefcases and try to keep in step.



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Fourth Avenue was a sea of people Sunday as the parade headed toward the Seattle PrideFest at Seattle Center.



Larry Stickney, executive director of Washington Values Alliance, said Friday his group is "on track" for collecting the 120,511 signatures needed to put Referendum 71 before voters. He declined to give numbers.

"It's relevant to ask people of Washington state to vote on this instead of asking a Legislature that is not responsive to the majority of people in this state," Stickney said. "We can't be subject to the tyranny of the minority."

It was unclear Sunday, though, who constitutes the minority, as thousands of parade-goers cheered nearly 200 groups representing interests as varied as the Filipino Youth Activities Drill, the Feminist Karate Unit and Woodland Park Zoo.

Some younger parade-goers expressed anger toward President Obama, who expressed support for same-sex marriage as a candidate but whose administration filed a legal brief supporting the Defense of Marriage Act, which defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

"Obama doesn't really feel gays should be equal," said Daniel Degouveia, 19, of Seattle. "We deserve to have children and enjoy the same rights as everyone else."

Older spectators tended to be more forgiving, saying they had seen gains in their lifetimes that made them confident that same-sex couples would attain equality and that Obama soon would make good on his promises.

There were, of course, those more interested in the party than in politics.

"I'm not the marrying type," said Jeff Foster, 30, a living work of art decked out in black leather with a rainbow-colored mohawk, silver-studded face and ears, and tiny ruby horns sticking from his forehead above his pierced eyebrows.

The self-described goth/punk/pagan from Bend, Ore., traveled to Seattle to experience a sense of "family and safety and belonging" with a larger community.

"The last Pride I went to in Bend was 200 people in a park," Foster said. "You couldn't tell it was really Pride."

Spectators saved some of their biggest cheers for marchers with PFLAG — Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays — who hugged their way down Fourth Avenue.

Hot-pink stickers bearing the group's acronym were ubiquitous along the parade route and at Seattle PrideFest, which followed at Seattle Center, an indication of just how many people were touched — literally — by the group.

"Walking in the parade is overwhelming for me," said Barbara Clark-Elliott, a PFLAG mother who leads the group's Renton support group and handed out pink dots to the people she hugged Sunday. "The flow of emotion — sometimes I walk through the parade crying."

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Some members of GLEAM — Gay and Lesbian Employees At Microsoft — hold on to a rainbow being towed by cars as they walk in the parade.

Video | Pride Parade 2009

