

Couple fights for marriage

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of the process of having a public dialogue," Mullinax said.

"It's the beginning," says Pike. "We're just taking it a step at a time.

"I was born in the south and I grew up in the church — in the country. I learned from my mother and father and my faith to stand up in the face of adversity. Right now I'm standing up to ask my government to recognize my family."

But what prompted the two take the first step?

"It was Bush's statement on the Federal Marriage Amendment," says Mullinax. "Our family already sees us as a couple, and we felt Bush was gonna take away the rights that we've worked for thus far with his actions.

"Although it didn't affect us, we thought it was a big plus for the government here to offer domestic partnership benefits and we felt that [the amendment] would take those benefits away, too.

"That same night we talked with a friend who was excited about getting married to a woman in Mexico and we realized, as a gay couple, we couldn't have that. All of those things made it worth the cost of standing up, so that we can have a voice."

Although Pike and Mullinax were confident of the need for their actions, other individuals in the LGBT community weren't as initially receptive.

"At first, some of the people around us were saying, 'wait a minute, you can't do this,'" Mullinax recalls. "I think they felt that the battle would be better fought elsewhere and that doing this would just hasten a marriage amendment in North Carolina."

"We thought we already don't have anything — we have the DOMA laws — so we would lose by being silent," Pike says. "We were acquiescing — I just couldn't be quiet, I had to stand up."

According to Mullinax, Ian Palmquist at EqualityNC initially expressed reservations about their efforts "but is now supportive



'Poster boys' for gay marriage in N.C.: Richard Mullinax (left) and Perry Pike.

of what we're doing."

"Our attorney looked at the laws and saw that there was room for possibility here," Mullinax continues. "In the 'qualifications part' it doesn't specifically talk about a man and a woman — she feels there is room for a judge to make that decision and to make a decision different from what the attorney general has decided."

North Carolina has a nationwide reputation for being one of the country's most conservative states. The likelihood of same-sex marriage being allowed here in the near future — according to many LGBT activists who support the cause — is relatively slim.

Pike is unsure about those prospects.

"I don't know," he says guardedly. "But if we don't try, we won't ever have it. It's my dream and I'm willing to try and make that dream a reality."

Mullinax seems a bit more optimistic over the future prospects.

"I think we're gonna see it soon," he says brightly. "The legislators are coming into session. Same-sex marriage is a truly conservative idea. The state of North Carolina will only stand to benefit.

"If the fundamentalists block this, they are not Christian," he announces. "Now are people gonna buy this argument? I hope so. This is a win-win situation."

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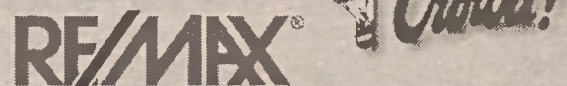
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