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# Where gay planner got her start

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — According to Bernadette Coveney Smith, her firm, 14 Stories, originally known as It's Our Time, is the country's first to specialize in legal LGBT weddings.

She launched the business in 2004, soon after Massachusetts became to the first state to legalize same-sex marriage. The lesbian decided to make this career shift when working as an event planner for a nonprofit in downtown Boston.

She was taking long lunches to attend the pro-gay marriage rallies at the State House and was impressed by the stories of homosexual couples seeking to marry legally.

Since opening 14 Stories, she has helped produce hundreds of weddings. The company recently expanded into New York City.

The entrepreneur also trains wedding professionals around the world on planning gay weddings and how to be sensitive to the unique needs of same-sex couples through another one of her ventures, the Gay Wedding Institute.

"The wedding industry hasn't caught up yet [to meet same-sex couples' needs]. It's still very heterosexist," Ms. Coveney Smith observed, noting the industry continues viewing marriage between a man and a woman and, consequently, is pushing away potential homosexual clients.

One way vendors discriminate, she noted, is by having "bride and groom" listed on their contracts instead of gender-neutral terms.

Just as the State of New York is amending its marriage license forms to accommodate same-sex couples, other wedding vendors need to, as well, she said.

Ms. Coveney Smith believes the weddings she plans are "changing the world."

"I have stood in the back of hundreds of same-sex marriage ceremonies and watched as the mostly straight guests welled up in tears of joy, elation, triumph and pride for the couple who is legally marrying," she wrote for her Web site, 14stories.com. "I know those guests go back home and tell their co-workers, neighbors and friends, 'I went to the best wedding last weekend ...' and proceed to tell the story.

"That's how the world changes, through experiences and stories," she went on.

"The more guests that attend these weddings, the more stories are told and the more opinions change. And when opinions change, public policy changes and when public policy changes, equality comes."

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