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Tuesday, December 3, 2013

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'Making it official'



HOLLY JOHNSON/Tribune-Herald

Linda Kamalamalama de Souza, left, and Wilhemina Kualoaonapua de Souza-Kamalamalama nuzzle noses after getting married outside of the state building in Hilo on Monday morning.

Longtime Hilo couple gets hitched on state's first day of legalized gay marriage

By COLIN M. STEWART
Tribune-Herald staff writer

If the old adage "Practice makes perfect" holds true, then the union to tie the knot Monday in Hilo is likely to be perfect indeed.

The intimate wedding ceremony they observed in front of the State Office Building on Aupuni Street around 9:45 a.m. was a small one, but being the couple's third time around, they didn't feel the need to make a big affair out of it, said Linda "Souza" Kamalamalama de Souza.

"When we had our civil union

"I never really thought we would be alive to see this day."

performed for us, that was a ceremony that was so beautiful. ... We had our family members and friends there. It was so beautiful, it was never to be improved," she

said. "In our minds, and in our hearts, after that we were already married. This time around, we're basically just making it official."

The Kalapana couple — de Souza, 68, and her bride, 61-year-old Wilhemina "Aunty Willy" Kualoaonapua de Souza-Kamalamalama — have been together for 35 years, and have waited patiently as Hawaii took its tentative steps toward marriage equality for lesbian and gay couples.

Years ago, they first committed to each other under the state's

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HELCO delays geothermal contract

Utility has missed two deadlines as it mulls 6 proposals from companies

By TOM CALLIS
Tribune-Herald staff writer

The Hawaii Electric Light Co. says awarding a contract for another 50 megawatts of geothermal power will take more time.

But how long remains unclear. The utility was initially expecting to make a selection among the six

companies that submitted proposals by September.

It later pushed that timeline to the end of November.

That deadline was missed, and HELCO Administration Manager Rhea Lee said Monday that a new date is in the process of being determined.

Whether that could be the end of

the month or sometime next year, she was unable to elaborate.

"We'll be providing information, additional information, on the next steps in the coming few weeks," Lee said.

What is causing the delay also remains unclear.

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Siren upgrades are set to begin

By TOM CALLIS
Tribune-Herald staff writer

The Big Island is expected to have at least seven warning sirens upgraded or installed over the next few months.

State Civil Defense spokeswoman Shelly Kunishige said work orders are being released for the department's \$25.6 million statewide siren upgrade project. Priority locations are being addressed first, and work should occur over the next three

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CAR VS. BUILDING

Store Manager Craig Okui looks at the damage to the Puainako McDonald's door Monday morning after a man drove his car into the building. For more on this story, see Page A7.

HOLLY JOHNSON/Tribune-Herald

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FROM THE FRONT PAGE

MARRIAGE From front page

former "reciprocal beneficiary" law, which afforded them some of the protections under the law that married couples enjoyed, although not all. Then, they were among the first couples in the state to apply for and complete a civil union when that law went into effect in January 2012.

And on Monday, they were second in line at the State Office Building in Hilo and ended up being the first to file their documents with the county clerk.

"I never really thought we would be alive to see this day," de Souza said. "I finally feel like we're on equal parity with the rest of the people who are married. ... We've had our health issues, and I've almost lost Willy four different times (to illness). This really was the will of God, us being here today ... and all those people who said that it's not God's will, that just shows their ignorance. But I've already forgiven them for their ignorance."

The couple was among about four hundred others in Hilo who had appointments to seek marriage licenses on Monday, the first day for same-sex couples to do so after the law went into effect at midnight, said Mary Farias, a license agent with the state Department of Health.

"We've had quite a few people make appointments, and I think West Hawaii is expecting big numbers," she said.

The state began accepting applications for licenses on its website at midnight. Before noon, Hawaii had issued about 40 licenses for same-sex marriage, with the majority being on Oahu, according to state Department of Health spokeswoman Janice Okubo.

Saralyn Morales was among six couples who tied the knot at a Waikiki resort shortly after the



HOLLYN JOHNSON/Tribune-Herald

From left, Linda Kamalamalama de Souza and Wilhemina Kuulohonapua of Souza-Kamalamalama get married by the Rev. Sharna Eberlein outside of the state building on Monday morning.

new law took effect.

"It's about making that commitment to the person that I want to spend the rest of my life with," she said shortly after cutting a small wedding cake with her spouse, Isiah Morales.

She also said the Health Department already has certified one same-sex marriage and was verifying documents for two dozen more. The state has up to two days to issue a marriage certificate once a marriage is performed if a couple obtains their license online.

Hawaii helped start the national gay marriage discussion more than two decades ago when a same-sex couple was denied a marriage license, leading to a court fight that eventually prompted Congress to pass the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996. Part of that law, which stipulated that marriage was between a man and woman, was struck down earlier this year by

the U.S. Supreme Court.

Tourists is the lifeblood of Hawaii and officials believe the islands will benefit from the new law. An estimate from a University of Hawaii researcher says the state will get a \$217 million tourism boost over the next three years as a result of gay marriage.

The new law allows couples to register for a license and be married the same day, a process that appeals to tourists. Couples can sign up for a license online then be verified by any license agent throughout the state.

Agents have set up shop throughout the islands, from resorts on Maui and the Big Island to hard-to-reach places on Kauai.

Saralyn and Isiah Morales began filling out license applications a few minutes after midnight, along with other couples. Several license agents huddled around four laptops in a tiny conference room, refreshing their

web browsers to coax a state-run website to load.

A few feet away, wedding guests sipped champagne, dined on curried shrimp and portabella mushroom sliders, listened to piano music and took pictures with the seven cakes on display for the occasion.

Couples who walked in to register on the spot posed with a three-tiered centerpiece called "Love" with a pink and white roses.

"Next!" Koala Akana exclaimed after being the first of the group to complete the license application with his groom, Ethan Wing. Akana said he and Wing were getting married after entering into a civil union last year so they could receive federal benefits.

"Got dinged on taxes last year because we're not legally married, and we will be married for taxes this year," Akana said. "Now we're equal to everybody in Hawaii that's married, everybody in the nation and the world, so that's a honor."

One of the organizers, Honolulu Pride Chairman Michael Gololoh Jr., said early Monday that more than three dozen couples had signed up to wed.

"We started this battle 23 years ago and we got to finish it tonight," Gololoh said.

Hawaii businesses now are looking for ways to embrace the gay community, he said.

"They opened up their doors to us, their hearts to us," Gololoh said. "That's what we're seeing with a lot of the business community that understands that \$217 million is what our economy needs to keep on going."

Editorial of the Associated Press contributed to this article.
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including solar panels, composite poles and more modern sirens.

The project is about 87 percent funded. It may take several years to complete.

Oliveira said two sirens were confirmed to have failed during the monthly test Monday.

Those are located in Ocean View Estates and Kalapana.

Another in Waipio Valley was already offline. Replacement parts have been

ordered, Oliveira said.

He said he believes there has been improvement seen during the tests each month.

"Obviously, we'd like to shoot for 100 percent all the time," he added.

Efforts by the Police Department to improve the radio network used currently for activations, have helped, Oliveira said.

"We're having better performance," he said.

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SIRENS From front page

months, she said.

In Hawaii County, those locations are King's Landing, Halii Kai, Kolea Kai, Upchurch, Miloli, Hawaiian Beaches No. 2 and Leilani Estates.

Another three priority locations have been identified but land access agreements are still needed to transport equipment, said Darryl Oliveira, county Civil Defense administrator.

The project is intended to modernize the state's siren

system, used mostly for tsunami warnings. The aging system has been plagued by failures, with several sirens typically not responding during monthly tests on the island.

In total, the county will receive 51 new sirens, bringing the number to 124. A new activation system that relies on cellular and satellite networks, rather than radio transmissions, will be installed, and some existing locations will also receive other upgrades,

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HELCO From front page

Lee said she is unable to comment on why the process is taking longer than anticipated.

"I cannot discuss the reasons for the holdup," she said.

Lee added: "I can tell you that we are really looking at these proposals very closely."

"We want to make sure that geothermal that we add will not be tied to the price of oil because we do want to lower the electrical rates for the customers. It's not an easy decision."

Twenty-five of the 38

new geothermal power producers are renegotiating contracts to detach the cost of buying the electricity from the price of oil, Lee said. Those producers include companies like PGV that sell power to the utility. Lee said she could also not discuss details about those talks.

"I can say that some are willing to talk with us and are talking with us," she said. "Some are not."

Those talks began last

year.

PGV, owned by Ormat Technologies, is one of the companies seeking the contract, Lee said again she could not comment.

Asked if the proposals are too costly or if HELCO

is asking for more information from those seeking the contract, Lee said again she could not comment.

Additionally, HELCO is still talking to some of its independent power

producers about renegotiating contracts to detach the cost of buying the electricity from the price of oil, Lee said. Those producers include companies like PGV that sell power to the utility. Lee said she could also not discuss details about those talks.

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year.

Additional information

is available at www.helco.com.

Not all venous insufficiency appears on the surface of skin as seen here, sometimes patients suffer from these symptoms with no visible signs.

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ROBBERY From front page

A felonies punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

Menino robbed Rainbow-Jo women's clothing boutique and Tiny Bubbles baby clothing boutique on Jan. 31 at about 11:50 a.m. The stores are separate businesses with different owners at the same location, 291 Keawe St.

The store clerk, Rachel Conder, told police a woman entered the store alone, walked up to a cash register, threw a purse onto the glass counter, brandished a handgun and demanded all the money from Rainbow-Jo's cash register. Conder said she took \$137 from the cash register and gave the money to the woman. Conder reported the woman had taken money from Conder's purse behind the counter and "wanted to know who she was." Conder gave her \$20 from her purse. She reportedly refused to give Menino her name but handed her another \$100 from Tiny Bubbles' cash register.

Conder took a cell phone photo of the pickup truck Menino was driving as she turned right from Furneaux Lane onto Keawe Street, and got the truck's license plate number. She also later identified Menino from a photo lineup, court documents state.

Menino was arrested about a half-hour later on Makala Street in Hilo. An unloaded .22-caliber revolver was plain sight in the pickup truck. Menino told police she "just did something stupid" because "she owed her boyfriend money," according to documents.

During Prosecoator Shannon Kagawa told the court that Conder was traumatized by the robbery and quit her job at the boutique shortly afterwards.

Menino wiped away tears during sentencing. She addressed the court, but most of what she said was barely audible and could not be understood from the courtroom gallery. Hilo Circuit Judge Greg Nakamura told Menino he couldn't hear her and asked her to repeat part of her statement.

"I apologize to the victim and I apologize to the state," she replied. "I will follow through with whatever consequences the state gives me."

Menino's mother was in the courtroom but declined to comment afterward.

Kagawa said afterward the state is satisfied with the sentence "based on the plea agreement."

Menino made a very bad mistake in this case," she said. "However, the community is safer based on the fact that the court sentenced her to 10 years in prison."

Menino's court-appointed attorney, Kanani Laubach, said she believes the sentence "is the best deal the state would give us with the charges and evidence that Ia was facing."

"Now it's up to the parole board to set what the minimum (amount of time to be served) is. So I'm gonna go (to Honolulu) and ask them to set a low minimum," she said.

Laubach said she believes Menino will turn her life around after her release from prison.

"She's a good girl. In high school she was an all-star athlete and she got good grades. She has some college and she has family support."

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