

Wedding paints Knysna sky pink | IOL

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Yolande Stander

AFRICA'S first mass same-sex wedding added a dash of colour to gloomy weather on the Garden Route, when 15 couples tied the knot in the usually sleepy holiday town of Knysna.

The wedding yesterday was part of the 16th Knysna Pink Loerie Mardi Gras and Arts Festival, one of the country's biggest gay pride events, with celebrations held at the Villa Castollini guesthouse and venue between Knysna and Brenton-on-Sea.



The 15 same-sex couples pose after getting married or renewing their vows during the 16th annual Knysna Pink Loerie Mardi Gras and Arts Festival. Pictures: YOLANDE STANDER. Credit: Yolande Stander

“As we celebrate 16 years of making a mark on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community, and the 10 years since same-sex marriage in our country was legalised, we felt it only appropriate to highlight one of the most appreciated and sought-after rights – the right to marriage equality,” festival organiser John O’Neil said.

Among the couples who said their I do’s were gay rights pioneers Vernon and Tony Gibbs-Halls, who became the first couple in Africa to wed a decade ago. The two, who live in Hoekwil on the Garden Route, were invited to renew their vows as part of their 10th wedding anniversary celebrations.

The couple legally married on December 1, 2006, when the law allowing same-sex marriages came into effect.

Knysna’s deputy mayor Esme Edge and local advocate Julie Seton also joined the group to renew their vows after marrying earlier this year.

The couples who participated in the event were chosen by organisers and were showered with prizes including a full wedding package with dresses, suits, rings, photographs, a weekend honeymoon and other goodies.

“One of the greatest things about our area is its people and their ease with which they embrace people from different nationalities, cultures, creeds and race. Having the first African LGBTI mass-wedding taking place in our beautiful area just once again proves how we work together to create shared values in a place that so many have chosen to now call home,” Knysna tourism body Knysna and Partners chief executive Greg Vogt said.

The Gibbs-Halls agreed, saying the area and the country had come a long way in changing attitudes towards the LGBTI community.

“It is very different now than it was for us when we married 10 years ago. People are more accepting and realising that love extends beyond boundaries,” Tony said.

The couples were among thousands of visitors around the country who flocked to Knysna for the festival over the past few days.

The event attracts between 25 000 to 30 000 people every year, and raises thousands of rands for charity.

The barrage of drag shows, parties, art exhibitions and all-night festivities which made up this year’s festival culminates in a street parade today, which will feature floats, street performances and other entertainment.

The parade is a popular feature on the festival programme, and brings the town to a standstill as curious onlookers flock to the main street to get a glimpse of participants in flamboyant outfits strutting their stuff.

Leading the parade will be yesterday’s newlyweds. – Garden Route Media