

APPAREL

from page A1

reserved for married couples, such as spousal health-insurance benefits, up to and including legal marriage.

"We eventually want a holy union," said Deena Marie Drake, 23, who registered with her roommate of 10 months, Gwendolyn Cone, 25. "This is really a token, but it's something we worked on it."

Matt Coles, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union who helped write the legislation, said the registration could give homosexual couples a foothold in some legal matters, such as gaining custody or visiting rights with a disabled partner.

"This probably won't change our relationship," said Christmas Leubbe, 41, who registered with Alice Leimsoth, 39, after four years of living together. "What's going to change is our interaction with the outside world. We deserve the same rights as married people. ... We're moving forward now and they can't stop us."

Not everyone was in a celebratory mood. The Rev. Charles McIlhenny of the First Orthodox Presbyterian Church, who helped lead the successful fight to defeat a similar measure in 1989, said the law "opens a Pandora's box."

"It's basically a complete reversal of traditional Christian moral values. ... It completely distorts the whole importance of marriage, family and home," he said. "Now it's two people — what's to keep it from being three people? And then what's to keep it from being three people and sheep?"

As many as 5,000 people initially were expected to register. By 4:30 p.m. yesterday, however, only 250 had signed up, although many more participated in the mock wedding march down the grand staircase at City Hall.

City officials attributed the low registration to the media glare. At the same time, some homosexuals have argued against registering, fearing that having their names on a list could make them vulnerable to witch hunts.

Most of those who turned out yesterday said they were already public about their homosexuality. "I'm probably already on 10,000 other lists. This is just one more," said Mr. Bloom, who wore a T-shirt under his leather jacket with the message: "Nobody Knows I'm Gay."

To register, couples had to pay \$35 and fill out a form swearing they lived together, agreed to be responsible for each other's food, shelter

and debts, and shared "an intimate, committed relationship of mutual caring."

A few couples living outside San Francisco also registered their relationships, using a Notary Public. There were also several heterosexual couples.

"We like the idea because it's not exclusionary," said Eleesa Hager, 37, who registered with her boyfriend of six months, James McMullen, 39. "We're in love and our gay and lesbian friends are in love. It feels really fair."

Divorces are as easy as filling out another form, this time without the fee. "I'll wager that at the end of the year you're going to have fewer lesbian and gay separations than straight divorces," predicted Jean Harris, aide to homosexual Supervisor Harry Britt.

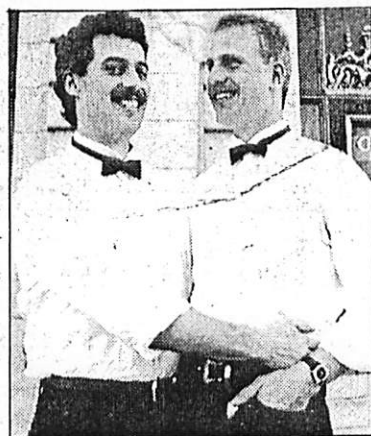
Having the law take effect on Val-

entine's Day could give the holiday a new homosexual slant, since many of the couples said they planned to celebrate the anniversaries of their registrations.

"It's quite special that they decided to do it on Valentine's Day — it's sweet," said Walter Rosenthal, 31, who registered with 38-year-old Larry May after eight years together. "It's been advertised as a heterosexual holiday for so long."

San Francisco is not the first city to register domestic partners. West Hollywood, Calif., and Ithaca, N.Y., already have similar laws in effect. Another domestic-partners law approved in Minneapolis will go into effect in the next month.

The California legislature also is weighing a bill — considered a long-shot — that would allow domestic partners to register throughout the state.



Wally Macillian and Richard Faust are all smiles after registering in San Francisco as "domestic partners" under a new law with symbolic impact.

Domestic partners don gay apparel

By Valerie Richardson
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

SAN FRANCISCO — Decked out in flowers, tuxedos and bridal gowns, hundreds of homosexual couples flocked to City Hall here yesterday on the first day of a landmark law allowing them to register their relationships.

The law, which passed 54 to 46

percent on the November ballot, allows unmarried couples — homosexual or heterosexual — to fill out a form declaring themselves "domestic partners." The agreement is mainly symbolic, carrying few legal obligations and no benefits.

Nonetheless, the city treated the Valentine's Day event like a mass wedding.

Newly registered couples could

participate in a mock religious ceremony presided over by two lesbian Lutheran ministers, a mock civil ceremony led by lesbian Superior Court Judge Donna Hitchens, and an all-night reception at the War Memorial Building across from City Hall.

"It's only symbolic, but trust me — when you go into this you really think about it, like, oh my God, it's forever," said Gwynn Goodner, 27, who registered with his roommate of two years, Bert Bloom, 41. "It's recognition of us as a couple — somebody's finally recognizing us for what we are."

Others saw the ceremony as the first step toward gaining privileges

see APPAREL, page A5