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Marriage equality advocate becomes justice of the peace

By [Kendra Baker](#) on February 20, 2015 in [People](#) · [0 Comments](#)

About author



Jeffrey Busch



Kendra Baker

Following a unanimous vote by the Democratic Town Committee (DTC) on Tuesday, Feb. 3, Wiltonian Jeffrey Busch was sworn in as the town's newest justice of the peace three days later.

"I feel grateful for the honor to have been chosen by the Democratic Town Committee to serve in this capacity," said Mr. Busch, who mentioned that his 12-year-old son, Eli, is also "very pleased" about his new role.

While Connecticut justices have several powers, including taking depositions and acknowledgments and administering oaths and affirmations, Mr. Busch said, "the biggest responsibility is the most joyful one — performing marriages."

Before becoming co-founder and president of Nantucket Spider, a Wilton-based company that produces all-natural, DEET-free bug repellents, Mr. Busch worked as an administrative judge in New York City for many years.

"The law mostly deals with property and things, but marrying is the closest the law ever gets to dealing with love," said Mr. Busch.

"To be part of the process — to help people make that incredible commitment of joining their lives together — that's exciting."

Community involvement

In a Feb. 3 press release, the DTC cited Mr. Busch's involvement and dedication to the Wilton community as one of the reasons he was nominated to be the new justice.

In addition to Nantucket Spider, Mr. Busch is a real estate agent with Higgins Realty, board member of Trackside Teen Center, trustee of the Montessori School and a member of the Back Yard Beekeepers Association.

Marriage equality

Mr. Busch's advocacy for marriage equality in Connecticut was another reason the committee selected him for the justice of the peace position.

"Jeff and his husband are two heroes of the marriage equality movement in Connecticut and nationally," said DTC Chair Tom Dec. "Their courage and advocacy has changed the lives of millions of people for the better."

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Mr. Busch and his partner Stephen Davis were one of six couples to file suit against the state, claiming a ban on gay marriage violated their rights as citizens, in the 2004 "Kerrigan v. Commissioner of Public Health" case.

In 2005, the legislature tried to pass a marriage equality statute but did not have enough votes, said Mr. Busch, so a civil union statute was passed instead.

"The civil union statute was solely for people of the same gender," said Mr. Busch. "It was sort of a special institution to keep people from getting married."

Mr. Busch said he and his partner were left with a tough decision — to have a civil union or wait to get married.

"After looking closely at the law, we realized that we could have a civil union and when we won the right to marry, we could marry," he said.

Mr. Busch said he went to the town clerk, got a list of justices of the peace and was told he would need to ask them if they would perform a civil union.

"In part of getting the civil union law passed, there was a caveat that if a justice of the peace decided that they didn't want to perform it, there would be no penalty to the justice of the peace," said Mr. Busch.

"It was really tough to look at a list and know I'd have to make a phone call to somebody who could say, 'No, I feel uncomfortable with your life.' Fortunately, I recognized one of the names on the list and thought, 'Oh, thank goodness.'" In 2008, the lawsuit was won and judicially established same-sex marriage in Connecticut. Shortly thereafter, in 2009, Mr. Busch was able to marry his partner of more than 20 years.

"For me, getting married was a tough journey and I'm so pleased that I can be part of the process to make it easy for other people who want to get married," said Mr. Busch.

"Now me, as a justice of the peace, I get to be the 'yes' guy. I just love that."

Mr. Busch, who grew up in Wilton, said his new role makes him feel closer to the community.

"Being gay in Wilton in the 1970s and 1980s — I really felt like an outsider, and by being a justice of the peace, I feel very much woven into the fabric of this community," he said. "I feel that the very thing that made me an outsider is no longer a factor."

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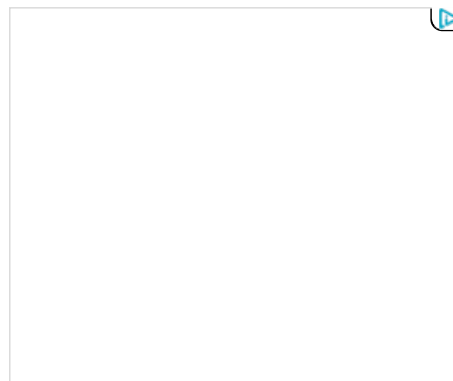
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