

LOCAL NEWS

Wagner alumnus, partner are married in Michigan

Gene Barfield, Tim LaCroix legally wed under the laws of Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians

By **DEBORAH YOUNG**
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When Gene Barfield was a student at Wagner College in the early 1970s, the Stonewall riots had just given birth to the modern gay rights movement. Still, the epicenter of activism across the bay in Greenwich Village, seemed miles away from the quiet Grymes Hill campus.

For Barfield, an energetic, articulate student, who served as editor-in-chief of the campus newspaper, as well as on the student senate and several Board of Trustees committees, and, in the process, was nominated to "Who's Who Among Students in American Colleges and University," it was a time to immerse himself in college life.

But his activism for equality had begun to bud: He was elected to membership in Omicron Delta Kappa (ODK), the national collegiate honors fraternity, in 1973, and worked successfully with other members to open membership in ODK to female college students.

Now, 40 years later, Barfield is at the vanguard of the marriage equality movement in his adopted home of Michigan: He and his partner of 30 years, Tim LaCroix, Friday were the first same-sex couple to wed in the state.

"The blessings of freedom, dignity and liberty are meant for all people without exception," said Barfield, who proudly served in the U.S. Navy, has worked promoting historic preservation for the Miami-Dade County's Office



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Wagner College alumnus Gene Barfield married his partner of 30 years, Tim LaCroix, becoming the first same-sex couple legally married within the state of Michigan.

of Community and Economic Development, and has a long history of activism on behalf of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.

"Between us, we have given eighteen years of honorable service to the United States, in the U.S. Navy. In that time and since we did not ever stop to consider whether we should offer service to the nation only to benefit and defend some of America's people."

Michigan does not recognize same-sex marriage and, in 2004, voters there approved amending the constitution to ban it.

But the ceremony uniting the two longtime partners in marriage took place at the government headquarters complex of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, a federally recognized tribe of Native American people.

The partners, who met on active duty in the Navy in 1993 and have been dedicated to each other ever since, became husbands just moments after the tribe signed into effect its marriage statute allowing for same-gender marriage.

LaCroix is a tribal citizen, and Barfield will become his legally wed non-tribal spouse under the laws of the tribe.

"As our first act as a married couple, as military veterans we publicly and respectfully salute Native American and First Nation people everywhere, and join with all people throughout the state and nation who understand and support the fundamental purpose of marriage, which is to create and sustain a community of stable, happy families as the basic building block of a strong and thriving nation," said Barfield.

The wedding planning was whirlwind, low-key and all done in a week, only it became clear the tribe would sign the new law into effect.

Still, after three decades of abiding love for each other, simply being able to be wed and in so doing move forward the push for marriage equality is far more important than throwing a fancy party, said Barfield.

"I get to marry the man I've loved for 30 years," he said. "I am the luckiest, happiest man in the world."