

Dayenu celebrates gay ceremonies

HARLEY DENNETT

The Jewish Dayenu float in this year's Mardi Gras parade will honour the first gay and lesbian couples to hold formal commitment ceremonies blessed in Australian synagogues.

Scott Whitmont and Christopher Whitmont-Stein and Nicky Glover and Michelle Sanders will lead the float, now in its 10th year. Both couples held commitment ceremonies last year in front of their family and Jewish community after a decision by Australia's Progressive rabbis to allow formal ceremonies similar to weddings.

Joining the "Love, commitment ceremonies and gay marriage" float will be English rabbi Mark Solomon and his partner Gordon, and local Jewish youth groups.

Dayenu member Kim Gotlieb said the youth involvement indicated a generational change in the faith-based community which was slow to include same-sex partners in religious and community functions.

"We have a fairly tokenistic acceptance. There are many situations where the partner is welcomed into the family and it's all quite sweet, and there's a lot of 'don't ask, don't tell' where the partner is not welcomed at Jewish functions," he said.

"Partners not being invited to weddings, or being ignored in various ways. Certainly very little ringing up to say 'happy anniversary' which happens in heterosexual culture."

Gotlieb added that many in Dayenu were



Roy Freeman and Kim Gotlieb prepare for the parade.

happy to have general acceptance and participate in Mardi Gras without rocking the boat in pursuit of full same-sex weddings.

But despite the recent progress made in the Progressive branch of Judaism, problems still exist that were not often talked about, he said.

"We still have the gay Orthodox man who feels suicidal because he doesn't have anywhere to belong or a lesbian trapped in a marriage of convenience without intimacy."

info: The annual Mardi Gras Shabbat service will be held at Temple Emanuel on Friday 6 March. A dinner will be held afterwards for \$50. Bookings for either can be made at info@dayenu.org.au.



Dayenu's float organisers stand beneath their chuppah.