



Gay couple hold first civil union ceremony on military base

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WRIGHTSTOWN, NEW JERSEY -- A gay service member in the Air Force and his partner entered a civil union on Saturday at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in Wrightstown, New Jersey.

The civil union of Tech. Sgt. Erwynn Umali and Will Behrens is considered the first same-sex ceremony held on a military base since repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

According to the AP, dozens of friends and family members attended the ceremony.

"We are so honored to be a part of this historic moment to be one of the first gay couples allowed to unite in a civil union on a military base," the couple said in a statement.

"We hope to be an inspiration to others in the LGBT community that struggle with the challenge of marriage equality. And that this issue is not just about the military, but the equal sacrifice and shared burdens of our loved ones who are civilians."

Kay Reeb, a Navy chaplain with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America who also serves at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, presided over the ceremony. She said she was delighted to participate in her first civil union.

"I told them the same thing I tell every couple – love each other and trust in each other and in God, that's what keeps us together," Reeb is quoted by the AP as saying.

Former Marine Staff Sgt. Eric Alva was among those attending the event. Alva lobbied Congress to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the law which for 18 years banned gay and bisexual troops from serving openly.

"It's a blessing for me to be here today," Alva said. "A historic event like this shows that progress is being made."