

## Gay couple who met through Blade personal ad marries

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*Cliff O'Neill and Doug Whiteman (Photo courtesy of the couple)*

A gay Florida couple who met through a Washington Blade personal ad more than two decades ago married in D.C. on Friday.

Cliff O'Neill, a then-reporter who had just moved to the nation's capital from Florida, placed an ad in the Blade in July 1990 that sought someone who liked "working out, dancing" and "nights huddled in front of a blazing VCR." Doug Whiteman, who was also a journalist at the time, responded.

The couple had their first date at Food for Thought in Dupont Circle. O'Neill and Whiteman quickly became good friends, but they dated other people before they and an acquaintance took a vacation to Walt Disney World the following year.

“He was a complete jerk the entire time, which sort of brought the two of us together,” O’Neill told the Blade on Thursday. “When we got back, I kind of realized that I’d been sort of kidding myself this whole time that Doug and I really needed to be together. And so then we were.”

The couple lived together in D.C. and Maryland before relocating to Columbus, Ohio, in 2005. They moved to Jupiter, Fla., in 2012.

O’Neill and Whiteman told the Blade they thought they would “eventually” get married in Florida, even though the state’s constitution bans nuptials for gays and lesbians. They said the U.S. Supreme Court decision that found a portion of the Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional and the Internal Revenue Service’s subsequent announcement that it would recognize legally performed same-sex marriages for federal tax purposes changed their plans.

The couple considered exchanging vows in Maryland or in New York where Whiteman once lived, but they eventually settled upon the nation’s capital.

“D.C. has a lot of sentimental meaning of course,” Whiteman said. “It’s where we met.”

Dan Cipullo, director of the D.C. Superior Court’s Criminal Division, officiated the couple’s wedding that took place during a small ceremony in Northwest Washington. Whiteman’s former co-workers and O’Neill’s long-time friend from college served as witnesses.

The couple plans to have a wedding reception in West Palm Beach, Fla., with family and friends once they return to the Sunshine State.

“I’ve never imagined that it’s actually getting to happen for me,” an emotional O’Neill said before the wedding.

“You just get so used to the idea that you can’t get married,” Whiteman added. “The reality of the fact that we can get married and we are getting married hasn’t really sunken in with me yet.”