

# The Hartford Courant.

## Wearing Their Hearts On Their T-Shirts

By ADRIAN BRUNE  
December 17, 2007

The symbol is known to many — three gold bars within a blue box, the Human Rights Campaign's ubiquitous sign, inspiring the fight for gay and lesbian rights and, apparently, T-shirts.

Seeing the bars on a bumper sticker during a drive with friends last spring, Reggie Solomon, a gay man living in New Haven, whimsically suggested a T-shirt expressing how the group in the car felt about gay marriage. He didn't realize the impact of his words.

"A friend of mine — a guy who made some money in the dot-com world — instantaneously said, 'I'll invest in that,'" Solomon said. During the ride, they came up with a design: a simple black fitted shirt with the slogan "[marriage is so gay]." When they came back to New Haven, Solomon and pals Ben Berkowitz and Andy Horowitz got down to business.

Six months later, the three friends have sold a few hundred American Apparel T-shirts with the logo, successfully launched a company — [www.issogay.com](http://www.issogay.com) — and set their aim on combating the conventional with a series of counterculture T-shirts advocating, and raising money for, causes aligned with their own values. Last week, they brought the cause to the next generation — or the like-minded parents who dress them — with a black "[marriage is so gay]" onesie.

"We wanted to start bringing a lighthearted product to people who believed in certain causes — a shirt all people could wear," Solomon said on a recent night after work at the Yale Office of New Haven and State Affairs. "Most of my

friends are straight — think of the power of the message when a straight person walks down the street with his wife and child wearing it."



"Clearly, we're not in this to make money. We give all our profits to causes," Solomon said. For the "[marriage is so gay]" shirts, [issogay.com](http://issogay.com) will send the Connecticut chapter of "Love Makes a Family" a check at the end of the year.

"We all have day jobs. We're not going to retire on the profits of these shirts," he added.

Besides the car ride and the HRC logo, the real impetus for [issogay.com](http://issogay.com)'s cause shirts came from Solomon's friend and business partner Berkowitz, a website designer who came out with a "New Haven: It's Better Than Your Town" shirt in 2006. The shirts took off, selling 800 in the course of a year and encouraging a follow-up: "Brooklyn: It's Better Than Your Borough," which pays homage to his other favorite municipality and home of his siblings.

"The success of the New Haven shirt definitely provided motivation to go ahead with the '[marriage is so gay]' project," Berkowitz said.

"Though they are totally separate concepts, they both operate on the idea that you can have pride for something you believe in and still look cool."

One other factor played into the creation of these T-shirt designs: an informal social group in New Haven for young professionals known as TGWNN, or "The Group With No Name." Founded a number of years back by New Haven native Janna Wagner as a list serve to bring people together and "turn residents into citizens" through socials, parties and events, the group has developed into a sort of idea incubator, helping its members move forward with their whims.

Berkowitz and Solomon credit the success of [issogay.com](http://issogay.com) and [newhavenshirt.com](http://newhavenshirt.com) to the encouragement of Wagner. The concept for [issogay.com](http://issogay.com) came about on a TGWNN retreat to Cape Cod.

"I suggested the New Haven shirt to Janna, and her enthusiasm concluded my 30-second marketing research study and the shirt was launched, initially through the TGWNN list serve, to nearly 1,000 New Haveners," Berkowitz said.

As far as [issogay](http://issogay.com)'s next T-shirt project, that won't be revealed until 300 "[marriage is so gay]" shirt orders go through Solomon's computer, are home-packaged and go out his door. However, it likely will not be gay-themed.

"We sit around all the time thinking of ideas for things," Solomon said. "We'd like to do something green — environment, maybe sustainable food."