

Divorce filings drop as COVID-19 lockdown mends marriages

By Dean Balsamini

Some experts predicted a flood of divorce filings when city courts re-opened for non-emergency business last month, believing that cooped-up couples would race to declare, “I don’t!”

But the number of married people looking to leave is dramatically down, dropping 45 percent in the last four weeks over the typical monthly average.

Even some who were headed for splitsville before the outbreak got their marriages back on track, lawyers said.

From May 25, when new lawsuits and divorces were allowed to be filed electronically for the first time in weeks in New York City, Long Island, Westchester and other locations, to June 24 just 1,265 divorce papers were filed, down from the 2,300 requests that commonly come in each month,

Dror Bikel, who told The Post in early May that at least seven clients had requested to withdraw their divorce filings, said he has not seen a surge of new cases.

Even so, he said, many married couples he knows are “experiencing extreme hardship,” including domestic violence, substance abuse, and “very difficult parenting issues.”

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according to the state Office of Court Administration.

Leading the way for lasting love was Queens, where OCA insisted just nine people filed to end their marriages. The office couldn’t explain why that number was so low.

Manhattan Supreme Court recorded the most of any borough, with 605 divorce requests, while Brooklyn reported 494. The Bronx tallied 127 cases and in Staten Island 30 were filed, records show.

Divorce attorney Val Kleyman told The Post that when the city announced its lockdown, friends and colleagues warned him to brace an avalanche of unhappy couples looking to split.

Kleyman said he had his doubts, but he knew the pandemic would provide a big challenge to married life.

“Essentially, COVID and

quarantine would be a test of relationships and marriages and only those who would have a solid foundation and were in good partnerships would be able to overcome the confinement, stress and pressure of the pandemic,” he said.

What he didn't expect was good news from a client of his in Wall Street finance, who had been sleeping on the couch, his wife angry that he worked so much and neglected his wife and kids.

When the pandemic struck, he was forced to stay home — and had to abandon plans to bolt because the courts were closed.

“At first, I would get emails from him about how much this was a living nightmare and how he could not wait to leave. After about a month, his emails stopped,” said the lawyer.

In May, Kleyman contacted his client to tell him the good news: the courts had reopened and his client could file for divorce.

But the Wall Street husband said he and his wife were “working things out” and “COVID and quarantine gave their marriage a true second chance.”

Another unhappy marriage involved two people who both owned businesses that got clobbered by the shutdown.

“This couple decided it would be best to ‘wait out’ this time and use the rest of the year to focus on preserving their livelihood

instead of proceeding with divorce carrying hefty legal fees and more uncertainty,” Kleyman said.

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