

# the rest of our world

## Finnish partnerships

HELSINKI, Finland — Gay and lesbian couples in Finland may soon be able to form legally protected partnerships.

The government has proposed the arrangement, but it says same-sex couples should not be allowed to adopt children or share a surname.

The proposal, presented by President Tarja Halonen, now goes to the Parliament, where the five government parties hold a majority and are expected to approve the measure.

Finland would then join fellow Nordic countries Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland in legalizing gay partnerships. Denmark and Iceland also let gay couples adopt children in certain circumstances.

Under the proposal, same-sex couples 18 years or older could make their union official in a civil ceremony, comparable to matrimony but nevertheless "a separate legal institution." Gay couples would have the same rights as those who are married when it comes to inheritance and divorce.

## Phone benefits

ATLANTA — Another large company is permitting the partners of its gay employees to qualify for benefits as if the couples are married.

The decision by BellSouth Corp. affects only management employees, who make up about 26,000 of the company's 93,000 workers, BellSouth spokeswoman Nechole Merritt said.

She said providing the benefits makes the company more attractive to potential employees.

"We have been looking at the business environment, and as we become more competitive, we wanted to make sure we do everything we could to attract and retain a talented and diverse workforce," she said.

About 3,600 mostly large companies offer the benefits. BellSouth is the last of the former Baby Bells to offer the benefits.

## Dutch marriage

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands — Dutch gay and lesbian couples have won full marital rights.

Parliament will begin sifting through tomes of law to expunge phrases like "father and mother" and "man and woman" after legalizing marriage and adoption by gay couples.

Two bills extending equal rights to same-sex couples won endorsement by the upper house last month after clearing the more powerful lower house in September.

By the time the law takes force next April, the wording of civil codes will be brought into line by referring to "partners" rather than male-female pairs.

Although several other countries register same-sex couples and some even call them marriages, the Dutch law goes further in eliminating references to gender. It also gives all couples equal rights to adopt children after living together for three years and approval by a court.

The Vatican assailed the law, calling it "a grave attack on the family in its natural and Christian model."

## Sticker shock

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. — An effort to promote diversity ended with a slap at gays and lesbians.

Rainbow stickers placed on police cars and other city vehicles are being removed because of complaints that the emblem promotes homosexuality.

City officials said the stickers of a rainbow overlaid with human figures were meant to endorse diversity. But they drew hundreds of letters and e-mails to the City Commission because the rainbow emblem is a symbol for acceptance of gays.

Mayor Larry Hardy said he had "no idea it had anything to do with the gay community."

"I personally think I was kind of conned," he said. "I was stupid not to know what the symbol stood for."

The decision to remove the stickers prompted some of the 100 residents at a meeting to weep and leave

the room. Others cheered.

City Commissioner Margaret Dodd, who designed the stickers, said the design "was never in mind just a gay thing."

She said the stickers evolved as a result of a series of hate crimes in the community. In September, three men attacked an employee at a bar frequented by gays.

## Catholic disrespect

NEW YORK — A city entertainment guide had to quickly back down after publishing an item describing Cardinal John O'Connor's death as one of the best things to happen to the gay community last year.

The item, which appeared in the Jan. 4-11 issue of *Time Out New York*, read: "The press eulogized him as a saint, when in fact, the pious creep was a stuck-in-the-1950s anti-gay menace. Good riddance!"

The item was in a box headlined "The Best and Worst of 2000" on a listings page geared to gay readers.

"We regret the insensitive tone of the statement and apologize to anyone who was offended by it," *Time Out* editor Joe Angio said. But he added the magazine stood by the claim that the cardinal was an impediment to gay progress.

O'Connor, who headed the New York Archdiocese for 16 years, led the way in opening Roman Catholic hospitals to AIDS patients. But he also fought for gay legal rights and condom distribution. And at the height of the AIDS epidemic, he forced a gay Catholic group out of a parish church where it had been meeting for eight years.

## MTV-Hate crimes

NEW YORK — MTV is trying to do something about hate crimes.

The network planned to break from regular programming for 17 hours to run a continuous list of hate crime victims' names.

The gesture, a scroll of names, kicks off a yearlong public service campaign against discrimination.

The commercial-free air-

ing of victims' names will cost MTV about \$2 million in advertising, said Brian Graden, the network's programming president.

"Our hope is it really gets the attention of our audience and motivates them to get involved," Graden said before the campaign started.

The campaign is prompted, at least in part, by MTV's own corporate soul-searching over its role in the rise of Eminem. The rap star, who received four Grammy nominations this week, has been criticized by gay rights groups for profane anti-gay lyrics. His latest album also depicts the killing of his wife and the rape of his mother.

## Caribbean laws

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — It's legal to be gay in the Caribbean.

Britain has scrapped laws making homosexuality a crime in its five Caribbean territories. London had to take the action after its territorial legislatures refused to do so.

The British move angered religious leaders, who say homosexuality is immoral and goes against the grain of the deeply religious and socially conservative islands.

"This is totally unacceptable to the minds of the Christian community here," said the Rev. Nicholas Sykes, chief pastor of the Church of England in the Cayman Islands.

The order from the British Privy Council, which acts as the highest court for the territories, decriminalizes homosexual acts between consenting adults in private. The order applies to Anguilla, the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos.

Britain's government said the anti-gay laws violate international human rights agreements it has signed. Britain has the power to unilaterally revoke the statutes, but had attempted for years to persuade local politicians to repeal the laws in island legislatures.

## Sex in Louisiana

NEW ORLEANS — Activists in Louisiana are trying to make sex legal.

They've gone to an appeals court seeking to overturn Louisiana's 196-year-old law barring sodomy, maintaining that it unfairly targets gays and lesbians.

In 1999, Judge Carolyn Gill-Jefferson upheld the law, ruling that it violates Louisiana's right to privacy but does not violate other rights protected by the state Constitution.

An appeal was filed by the Louisiana Electorate of Gays and Lesbians Inc., and nine gay or lesbian individuals, on grounds that the law "denies us the right to have sex under any circumstances," said John D. Rawls, LEGAL's attorney.

State attorneys, however, contend the law is needed to promote marriage and encourage procreation.

The case is pending before the state's 4th Circuit Court of Appeal.

## Jews and Scouting

NEW YORK — Reform Jewish leaders have recommended that parents withdraw their children from Boy Scout chapters and that synagogues end their sponsorship of Scout troops because of the group's exclusion of gays.

The Boy Scouts of America's stance on gays is "incompatible with our consistent belief that every individual, regardless of his or her sexual orientation, is created in the image of God and is deserving of equal treatment," the Joint Commission on Social Action said in a Jan. 5 letter to Reform movement congregations.

Congregations also should publicize their reason for cutting ties with the Boy Scouts to help educate the public, the commission said.

In all, Jewish organizations sponsor 277 of the group's 123,935 troops nationwide, a Boy Scouts spokesman said.

A synagogue in Coral Gables, Fla., Temple Judea,