

# the rest of



# our world

## Postal Pride

SAN DIEGO – U.S. Postal workers aren't allowed to show their colors.

Postal workers in San Diego were told they couldn't wear their uniforms in the city's annual gay pride parade.

The Postal Service's San Diego district issued the ruling after an employee who had been barred from taking part in uniform in an anti-abortion protest last year complained.

The Postal Service legal office cited a rule that "a supported project, event or cause must not be political or religious, and it must not be likely to involve the Postal Service in controversy."

About 40 employees marched in the parade. They are permitted to carry a banner identifying them as postal workers.

"A lot of us are glad to work for the post office, but just a little bit ashamed of what they are doing on a diversity level," said Frances Meana, a local postal supervisor.

## Nightline's Choice

NEW YORK – The producers of the ABC News show "Nightline" have learned how significant a name can be.

A controversy erupted after the show announced it planned a weeklong special in September that will be called A Matter of Choice? Gay Life in America.

It prompted "Nightline" executive producer Tom Bettag to post an explanation on the ABC News Web site. But he's not changing the title of the report, tentatively scheduled for late September.

"Two months in advance, we've never had this kind of thing before," Bettag said. "That the title and one punctuation point would raise this much controversy is really quite remarkable."

Most activists believe that their sexual orientation is at least partly a matter of biology, not something they choose as a result of cultural or psychological influences.

"A Matter of Choice?" is an easy title that piques curiosity and stirs controversy, but it does so at the expense of the people it's profiling," said Cathy Renna of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.

Bettag, in his posted response, said that although many gays and lesbians believe the question has been resolved, scientific and religious arguments remain.

"It is our job to ask the questions that make society examine itself," he said.

## Fear in the Fire Department

BOSTON – Gay and minority firefighters say they're subjected to racist, sexist and homophobic treatment in the department.

Karen Miller, who is black, said harassment by both white and black male firefighters drove her to a desk job with the department. She said that when she rushed to emergency calls at her Boston fire station, she found broken glass inside her boots. Other times, her oxygen mask and gloves were missing.

"The incidents of racism, sexism and homophobia have never been properly dealt with by the Boston Fire Department, and the individuals that are creating the problem are more than just a few bad apples," Miller said.

The Coalition for Firefighters' Civil Rights, which includes civil rights and community groups and a minority firefighters association, planned to seek the help of the City Council later.

The head of the Boston firefighters' union dismissed the group's complaints.

"We've made tremendous strides in bringing everybody back together again," said Jack McKenna, president of the International Association of Firefighters Local 718, the Boston firefighters' union. "I think this is a lot of hype."

## Houston Anti-discrimination

HOUSTON – It took 16 years to reinstate it, but the city of Houston has an anti-discrimination ordinance again.

protects employees from discrimination based on sexual orientation, race, gender, age and other factors.

"It is something that is long overdue and years in the making," said Councilwoman Annise Parker, a lesbian who was instrumental in getting the law passed.

The council in 1984 banned discrimination based on sexual orientation in city hiring, promotion and contracting. Voters repealed the ordinance the next year.

Mayor Lee Brown, who was active in changing the law, also wants to extend benefits such as health insurance to same-sex partners of gay city workers.

## Lesbian Spouse

SAN FRANCISCO – A woman in California is being permitted to sue the owners of a dog that mauled and killed

her partner even though such cases previously have limited to spouses.

At issue was whether the woman, Sharon Smith, had the legal standing to sue. Under California law, only surviving spouses or other relatives can bring wrongful-death claims.

But Superior Court Judge A. James Robertson II said that because state law does not allow gay couples to marry, the surviving-spouse rule should not apply to same-sex couples. The judge agreed with Smith's attorney that the rule violates the equal protection clause of the California Constitution.

"This is a remarkable day. This is the first decision of this kind, not just in California but anywhere in the country," said Smith's attorney, Shannon Minter of the National Center for Lesbian Rights. "It's a tremendous victory for lesbian and gay people in the United States."

Smith sued the caretakers of two large Canary Island dogs that killed her partner, Diane Whipple, Jan. 26 as she fumbled for keys in her apartment hallway.

## No Gays Allowed

GENEVA – Members of the U.N.'s World Conference Against Racism aren't interested in discrimination against gays and lesbians.

More than 100 nations meeting in an effort to reduce racism around the globe declined to include participation by gay rights activists.

Conference organizers say they intend to be inclusive.

But one of the first acts of the session was to exclude the International Gay and Lesbian Association from the list of accredited non-governmental organizations.

The vote was 43-43 with 27 abstentions. Under conference rules ties equal no votes.

## Maryland Rights

ANNAPOLIS, Md. – Supporters of gay rights in Maryland are seeking to block an attempt to roll back an anti-discrimination law.

They say that opponents did not get enough valid signatures on petitions asking voters to repeal the law in a statewide vote in 2002.

Opponents of the law, organized as Take Back Maryland, collected the signatures of 47,539 registered voters, 1,411 more than the number required to force a vote on

the law approved by the General Assembly in April. Opponents want to repeal the law, which has not yet taken effect.

But the lawsuit filed by backers of the law alleges that local election boards certified so many invalid signatures that the issue should not have qualified for the ballot.

The lawsuit filed in County Circuit Court alleges that many of the petition forms should have been rejected because they did not comply with state law, including a requirement that a printed summary of the law appear on the back of each petition.

The law would guarantee equal rights for gays in housing, employment and places of public accommodation such as restaurants and hotels.

## Gay Scout Leaders

BOSTON – Boy Scout leaders in the Boston area have adopted the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

"Discussions about sexual orientation do not have a place in Scouts," said Brock Bigsby, Scout executive for the Massachusetts Minuteman Council. "The Scouts will not inquire into a person's sexual history, and that person will not expose their sexual orientation one way or the other."

The Minuteman Council, an umbrella organization of 330 Scout troops and 18,000 Boy Scouts in Greater Boston, approved the bylaw July 19. The policy also prohibits the exclusion of anyone on the basis of race or religion.

Last year, the Supreme Court ruled the Boy Scouts of America may exclude gays from serving as troop leaders.

Bigsby maintains the new bylaw is consistent with the national Boy Scouts' policy, since scout leaders would not be permitted to discuss their sexual orientation.

## Lesbian Hyphenation

TRENTON, N.J. – A New Jersey woman will be legally permitted to change her name, adding a hyphen and her partner's last name.

A lower court judge had ruled that a name change would create the false impression that Jill Bacharach and her partner were married.

Thursday's ruling ordered that same judge to sign the

paper that will change the woman's surname to Bacharach-Bordman.

Name change applications are commonly rejected if attorneys prove a person is seeking to avoid prosecution or debt, or to perpetuate a fraud.

"I wasn't in any of those categories," said Bacharach, 33.

Bacharach testified that she wanted to show she was committed to someone and that the two were a family.

Those who filed briefs opposing recognition of the name change said it would provide a "form of legitimacy" to same-sex relationships that was contrary to the state's policy.

Judge Donald G. Collester disagreed.

"The legitimacy of such relationships is well-established," he wrote, citing the state's law against discrimination and court decisions giving parental rights to same-sex partners.

## Gay Church Assault

ROANOKE, Va. – You're not always safe even at church.

Two men and the pastor of a predominantly gay church were attacked after a Bible study and prayer meeting, police and the pastor said.

The Rev. Catherine Houchins was struck in the face when she tried to call 911 on her cellular telephone after the men were attacked, she said.

"They were yelling (expletive) faggots, get out of our town," Houchins said.

No one was seriously injured.

The assault outside the Metropolitan Community Church of the Blue Ridge stunned a congregation still coping with a shooting at a gay bar that killed one person and wounded six others last September.

In the incident, Armen Grigoryan and Richard Justus were getting into their car when three men emerged from an alley and shouted anti-gay epithets, Houchins and police said. The attackers knocked Grigoryan, 28, to the ground and punched Justus, 36, when he ran around the car to help his friend.

"They were in a total rage," said David St. Clair, another church attendee who joined Houchins in rushing to the victims' defense. "I've never seen