

the rest of our world

Gay Fund

NEW YORK — A fund has been established to assist the surviving partners of gays and lesbians killed in the Sept. 11 attacks.

The \$141,000 fund, whose money was all donated, will be administered by the New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project. Depending on how many people file a claim by the Jan. 15 deadline, organizers expect surviving partners to get a gift of between \$4,000 and \$6,000.

Jennifer Middleton, staff attorney for the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, said gay partners do not qualify for many benefits that are standard for married couples. She said they include money from state workers' compensation programs, Social Security benefits and some employee pension programs.

If there was no will left behind, gay survivors might have to fight for ownership of property, for access to retirement or savings accounts that both partners contributed to and for the right to handle the victim's estate, Middleton said.

Twenty-four killed in the attacks in Washington and New York have been identified as leaving behind domestic partners, according to the Empire State Pride Agenda.

Survivor Benefits

WASHINGTON — Barney Frank is urging Attorney General John Ashcroft to adopt a broad definition of who gets compensated as a survivor of those killed on Sept. 11.

The Massachusetts congressman is leading 44 of his colleagues in imploring the U.S. government to provide compensation to "all of those who had a close relationship with the murdered victim and whose own financial position will be seriously adversely affected by the death."

Criteria for such a relationship could include a domestic partner with a shared residence, shared bank accounts, joint membership in a health plan or a significant sharing of living expenses, Frank and his bipartisan group said.

The Justice Department is setting regulations to govern the distribution of funds approved by Congress and President Bush for victims of the terrorist attacks.

The lawmakers, in making their argument, said Congress acted in order to help those victimized by the deaths of

those close to them, not to "encourage or discourage people from following any particular pattern in their living arrangements."

British Progress

LONDON — There hasn't been a lot of progress on gay issues under Britain's Labor government.

That's the view of British actor Ian McKellen.

He said the Labor administration was no better than its Conservative predecessor at addressing gay issues.

In an interview with the Radio Times magazine, he said Blair's government was no more willing to act than former Conservative Prime Minister John Major, whom he called "woefully ignorant."

The actor and prominent gay rights campaigner also said it was "appalling" that gays were still discriminated against in the workplace in Britain.

The 62-year-old McKellen said Major was "woefully ignorant about gay people and their problems, as most politicians at the time."

"But I don't detect the present government is any more willing than he was to move things ahead. It's still legal to sack someone for being gay, which is appalling," he added.

Responding to his criticism Tuesday, the government said it recognized the "importance of tackling discrimination in the workplace."

Hate Crimes

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — A major civil rights group says the FBI severely underestimates the number of crimes of bigotry and racism, from petty vandalism to murder.

The Southern Poverty Law Center said the FBI counts about 8,000 bias-motivated crimes in America annually, but the actual number may total 50,000.

"Obviously, there's something wrong with that system," said Mark Potok, an editor of an article in the center's Intelligence Report.

The national statistics are skewed because many police officers don't label offenses as hate crimes, and some states report having none. The Hate Crime Statistics Act of 1990 calls for compiling data on those incidents, but compliance by police and states is voluntary, the report said.

Even blatant discriminatory crimes often go ignored, the article said. It cited the cases

of 19-year-old Sasezley Richardson, a black man slain in Elkhart, Ind., and Billy Jack Gaither, a gay man beaten to death in Sylacauga, Ala.

"These statistics are the basics of public policy, and we cannot effectively address hate crime without these numbers," Potok said.

The FBI acknowledges flaws in the data but says the system will improve as public and police awareness of bias crimes increases, said Maryvictoria Pyne, a spokeswoman for the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services.

Gay Murder

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Two brothers who are white supremacists and are accused of killing a gay couple have been sentenced to long federal prison terms for setting fires at three synagogues and an abortion clinic in 1999.

Benjamin Matthew Williams received a mandatory sentence of 30 years in prison under the guilty plea he entered in September. His younger brother, James Tyler Williams, was sentenced to 21 years, 3 months — the maximum.

The brothers also face trial in April on state murder charges in the slayings of a gay couple in Shasta County in 1999. Prosecutors are seeking the death penalty.

Benjamin Matthew Williams received a longer sentence because he planned the arsons.

Since his arrest, Benjamin Matthew Williams repeatedly professed anti-Semitic, anti-gay and white supremacist views, and has said his defense in the upcoming murder case will be based on his belief that the Bible condemns homosexuality.

Cruise's Crusade

LOS ANGELES — Tom Cruise has dropped for now his crusade to prove he's not gay.

He dropped a \$100 million defamation lawsuit against a magazine publisher after the publisher stated he does not have a videotape showing the actor having sex with another man.

"Cruise does not appear on the videotape to which said defendant referred ...," a Superior Court stipulation said. "(Cruise) is not, and never has been, homosexual and has never had a homosexual affair."

Cruise's lawsuit, filed June 4, accused Michael Davis of Bold magazine of sending news releases to at least a dozen U.S. media organizations alleging Cruise engaged in a homosexual relationship during his marriage to Nicole Kidman.

Under terms of the settlement, Davis must pay his own legal fees and is prohibited from "issuing or authorizing the issuance of any statement contrary to any of the foregoing findings."

Cruise's attorney, Bertram Fields, said his client was satisfied.

"Essentially, what Tom was after was the very finding that the court made," he said. "The story was false. He's not gay, and the judge so ruled."

Inmate Condoms

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles County is trying to do something about the spread of AIDS.

The county has begun giving condoms to gay inmates at its downtown jail in an effort to stop the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

The county Sheriff's Department, which runs the largest jail system in the country, said it spends \$180,000 monthly on AIDS medicine to treat 220 inmates.

Dutch Marriage

AMSTERDAM — Marriage has proven popular among gay and lesbian couples in the Netherlands.

Dutch civil servants wed nearly 2,000 same-sex couples in the first six months after gay marriage was legalized this year.

The gay marriage law that took effect on April 1 made the Netherlands the first country to grant gay couples the same rights as heterosexual couples, including the right to adopt children.

The Central Bureau of Statistics said 2,100 men and 1,700 women had married someone of the same sex by Sept. 30.

Gay marriages comprised 3.6 percent of all new marriages. In April, this figure was more than 6 percent as gays rushed to take advantage of the new law, but it gradually stabilized at around 3 percent.

Sixteen percent of the people who married someone of the same sex had earlier been

in a heterosexual marriage. Most were divorced, and a few were widows or widowers.

Salvation Army

NEW YORK — Those weren't all \$5 bills being dropped into the Salvation Army's red kettles this holiday season.

Shoppers were tossing in notes across the country chastising the Salvation Army for its policy toward its gay and lesbian workers.

The protest campaign started in Flint, Mich. after the Salvation Army's national leadership last month rescinded a decision by its 13-state Western branch to offer health benefits to domestic partners of gay and lesbian employees.

"It seemed so mean," said Mary Scholl, mother of a gay man, who started the campaign along with her colleagues in the Flint branch of Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

Since then, Scholl said, she has received scores of messages from across the country, some supportive, others hostile. "I've had 100 e-mails from people telling me I'm going to hell," she said.

The Washington headquarters of PFLAG has taken up the cause. Its Internet site shows supporters how to make copies of the protest notes, which vaguely resemble \$5 bills.

"I would have donated \$5," the note says. "But the Salvation Army's decision to discriminate against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered employees prevents my donation now and in the future."

At the Salvation Army's national headquarters in Alexandria, Va., officials say the protest appears to have caused little financial damage.

They make no apologies for a policy that limits family health benefits to married couples and their dependent children.

Some conservative activists, angered by the protest campaign, have offered to match every protest note placed in a kettle with a real \$5 bill.

The protest notes "are the very currency of intolerance," said Gary Glenn, president of the American Family Association of Michigan. "They're attacking a Christian organization in the holiest season of the Christian faith."