

the rest of our world

AIDS Ride Producer Closes

Los Angeles -- Pallotta TeamWorks, the controversial company which organized charity bike rides to raise money for AIDS groups, abruptly closed over a weekend in late August, laying off more than 250 employees.

The Los Angeles-based company had run the California AIDS Ride, but discontinued it after groups who were to receive money from the ride complained they actually got far less than expected. A similar ride in New York and one dubbed the Canada-to-US AIDS Vaccine Ride were also cancelled this year. One AIDS support group claims \$19 million dollars was raised by participants in three Pallotta AIDS rides but that less than three million went to fight AIDS after the company took out its expenses.

One volunteer, Greg Rodehau, told the *San Francisco Examiner* he participated in two Pallotta-produced AIDS rides, raising close to \$12,000, but became disillusioned with the company. "I saw how much money they were wasting," he told the paper. "There were huge trucks, fancy marketing brochures that were very expensive to produce, mobile trailers for the staff to live in, elaborate signage. I'm in marketing so I understand the cost of these things. It became more about Pallotta promoting Pallotta than about the San Francisco AIDS Foundation."

Pallotta also ran the Avon Breast Cancer 3-Day Walks, Out of the Darkness walks to raise awareness of suicide, and KidsMarch to benefit a children and family center in Los Angeles.

In a statement the company called the closure and layoffs temporary, saying it was a cost-cutting step and vowed to press ahead with breast cancer fund-raisers later this year in Atlanta, Los Angeles and New York.

Now We're 'Fit to Print'

New York -- The *New York Times* will begin printing civil union announcements in September.

Although a significant step for the nation's paper of record, it follows similar -- and some say braver -- decisions by smaller papers around the country. In July, the *Fayetteville Observer* in North Carolina ran its first recognition of a same-gender union. The *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* has published the announcements for three years.

The National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association immediately commended the Times for its decision to publish same-sex civil union and commitment announcements. The decision followed a meeting held in December 2001 with the leadership of NLGJA; gay and lesbian members of the newspaper's staff and Publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. and other senior officers of the *Times*.

A week after the *Times* announced its plans to accept gay and lesbian union announcements, the *Miami Herald* and the *Orlando Sentinel* said they would follow suit. *Sentinel* publisher Kathleen M. Waltz said the company was still develop-

ing a formal policy, but that the goal was to accept "celebrations of many different kinds."

NLGJA leaders have also met with *Boston Globe* editor Martin Baron, as well as editorial staff at other papers around the country. Although Baron said the decision was up for discussion, no decision has been made. In the meantime, the paper's ombudsman has spoken out in a column in favor of printing same sex union announcements.

In Vermont, due to public access laws, any newspaper that prints wedding announcements for heterosexual couples must also print civil union announcements submitted to it.

Red Cross and Gay Partners

New York -- The American Red Cross is making permanent the guidelines it put in place regarding the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks that provided gay domestic partners the same disaster relief assistance that spouses received.

Over the past few months the Empire State Pride Agenda, New York's statewide lesbian and gay civil rights organization has worked with several New York council members to get that commitment enshrined in Red Cross national policy.

Following a series of meetings, Harold Decker, CEO and Interim President of the Red Cross, announced "the guidelines that we used successfully in New York should be adopted more broadly as a permanent procedure of our organization." He also indicated that existing guidelines for all Red Cross chapters would be revised to reflect the new policy.

An Information Bulletin sent last month to all chapters across the US titled "Guidance on 'Family' Definition and Verification" states that immediate family includes "regularly financially supported significant others, fiancées, housemates and/or other family members."

The Bulletin also provides guidance on acceptable documentation that can be used to verify these family relationships and then lists many of the criteria that were used for gay partners of the September 11 victims, such as joint ownership of a home, joint leases, joint bank accounts, joint credit cards, utility bills with both names and joint renter's or home owner's insurance.

"This action by the Red Cross brings real meaning to its stated commitment to using a broad and inclusive definition of family when distributing assistance to all those who suffer due to a disaster or emergency, including lesbians and gay men," said Joe Grabarz, executive director of the Empire State Pride Agenda.

"We have only the highest regard for how the Red Cross responded to the concerns of the lesbian and gay community in New York City region. They listened; they understood; and, they took action. We believe the decision to make them permanent across all chapters was a wise one and will help avoid a repeat of what initially happened here," Grabarz said.

Gay Foster Parents in Arkansas

Little Rock -- Four prospective foster parents, including a gay couple and a heterosexual man who has a gay son, are challenging the ban on gays and lesbians from becoming foster parents in Arkansas.

In 1999 the state Child Welfare Agency Review Board voted 6 - 1 to bar gays and lesbians. Since then, the state Department of Human Services has asked prospective foster parents if they are gay. Those who answer affirmatively are denied the right to become foster parents.

"There is no record, no data of foster children being sexually abused by gay and lesbian couples," said Rita Sklar, executive director of the ACLU of Arkansas.

"They allowed their bias against gay people to guide their actions in the face of overwhelming social science evidence that lesbians and gay men make perfectly good foster parents," Sklar said.

The ACLU is representing the prospective foster parents in their suit. Lawyers for the ACLU filed papers in Pulaski County Circuit Court asking a judge to skip a trial and lift a ban on lesbian and gay foster parenting.

The case had been scheduled to begin in November. There has been no indication when the judge will issue a ruling on the ACLU motion or decide to proceed to trial. Julie Munsell, spokesperson for the DHS, declined comment on the court filings by the ACLU.

"Right now it's in the hands of the court system. We'll await the verdict. We'll do whatever the court orders us to do," she said.

Gay Black Men Need HIV Education

Washington, DC -- Up to 93 percent of young HIV-positive black gay men are unaware of their infection, according to a new report from the Centers for Disease Control.

The study, issued by the CDC in August said, "Nearly three quarters, or 71 percent, of those men who were found to be HIV-positive believed that there was either no chance, that it was very unlikely, or that it was unlikely that they were infected with HIV."

The Human Rights Campaign called the report a wakeup call for Congress.

"The new numbers released by the CDC this week are very alarming, and reflect a very dangerous trend in the fight against HIV/AIDS," said HRC Senior Policy Advocate Christopher Labonte.

Labonte called on Congress "to put forth the necessary resources for scientifically proven methods of HIV/AIDS prevention programs, such as those within the Minority HIV/AIDS Initiative."

"With no cure, the only effective way we have to fight this epidemic is prevention," Labonte said.

Created in 1999, the Minority HIV/AIDS Initiative (MHAI) provides funds throughout various federal HIV/AIDS programs

to community-based organizations and other entities to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic within minority populations. It currently receives \$381 million in funding.

The new study is consistent with other recent studies indicating that in several U.S. cities, the majority of young HIV/AIDS-infected gay men are unaware of their infection. The new numbers also showed that 37 percent of the men surveyed reported having unprotected anal sex in the previous six months.

"Young black gay men are not getting the prevention education that they need," said HRC Field Constituency Organizer Donna Payne, who specializes in minority outreach.

"Without targeted prevention efforts, this situation will continue to deteriorate. There are countless lives at risk every day."

HIV/AIDS is disproportionately affecting communities of color. In 1999, approximately two-thirds of all women and more than 40 percent of all men diagnosed with AIDS were black. Researchers in a separate study recently found that nearly one-third of young gay black men in six major US cities are infected with HIV.

Taking CUs to Hoosiers

Chicago -- Three same-sex couples filed suit today to have civil unions recognized by the state of Indiana. Ruth Morrison and Teresa Stephens, Dave Wene and David Squire, Charlotte Egler and Dawn Egler, all of whom have entered into civil unions in the state of Vermont, want their unions validated in their home state.

A 1997 Indiana law prohibits the state from recognizing same-sex unions performed in other states. State law already had banned same-sex marriage.

The suit was filed on behalf of the couples by the Indiana Civil Liberties Union in Marion County Superior Court.

ICLU Executive Director John Krull said, "Gay Hoosiers work, like everyone else. They pay taxes, like everyone else. They have mortgages and bills to pay, like everyone else. But they are denied the right to have their unions recognized by the state of Indiana. That's just not right."

The suit names Gov. Frank O'Bannon and the clerks of Marion and Hendricks counties as defendants. County clerks issue marriage licenses.

"We just want to be treated like any other couple," said Teresa Stephens, 45, of Indianapolis. "We expect to spend the rest of our lives together."

State Rep. Woody Burton, R-Greenwood, who authored Indiana's "Defense of Marriage" law, said he will seek further legislation if the lawsuit succeeds.

"The relationship between a man and a woman as a man and wife has been the standard since this country was founded," he said. Sean Lemieux, The ICLUs Equal Rights Project Director, will be arguing the case for the three couples.

"Our clients want to be treated just like any other citizens. They just want the same opportunity to build a life with someone they love that other Hoosiers have. They want to protect themselves and their children by gaining access to the comprehensive system of protections and obligations that are only available through marriage."

Gay Senator Leads Aussie Dems

Sydney -- An openly gay Senator has been elected as interim leader of the Australian Democrats.

Senator Brian Greig will serve until a party convention chooses a new national leader, probably in about a month, to replace Natasha Stott Despoja who was forced out in a party coup.

Greig said the first thing he will do as interim leader is apologize for the way the party had behaved in recent weeks.

The Democrats are deeply divided over a successor to Despoja. Even the election of Greig was controversial. Senator Greig was a town councilor in Perth and a prominent gay rights advocate before entering federal politics. But, he is not the first gay to lead a national party in Australia. The Greens already have a gay as leader in Senator Bob Brown.