

# the rest of our world

## The Drop of a Shoe?

Zurich – Founded seven years ago by two Swiss women, Shoe International is an internet community open to all women, currently boasting over 70,000 members from 140 countries. The thought behind the name was simple enough: there are as many different types of shoes as there are women.

Looking for a way to raise lesbian visibility all over the world, the group solicited ideas from members of their lesbian website. After much on-line discussion, the "Italian housewife" idea was chosen. SHOE members hang shoes outside their windows in a demonstration somehow similar to a traditional daily activity of Italian women. The first international SHOE day will be on March 4, 2004.

## "Know HIV/AIDS" at the Superbowl

New York – A multimedia campaign called "Know HIV/AIDS" will kick off its second year of delivering HIV awareness and prevention messages on Super Bowl Sunday. As announced last month, Viacom and the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation will premiere one of 34 new public service ads during the pre-game show of the Superbowl in what is promised to be a \$200 million media campaign reaching the United States, Europe, Africa and the Caribbean.

The campaign, including television, print, on-line, and outdoor advertising will be present on major and cable networks, radio stations, billboards, and buses. Throughout the year, there will be special HIV/AIDS related programming on MTV, Nickelodean, BET, and the Sundance Channel.

UNAIDS projects that nearly two-thirds of all new HIV/AIDS infections worldwide could be eliminated by 2010 with more effective education and prevention.

## HRC & Conservatives Defend Constitution

Washington DC – The Human Rights Campaign launched an ad campaign last month highlighting conservative opposition to a proposed constitutional amendment that would permanently deny marriage rights to same-sex couples. In partnership with conservative and state groups, the campaign includes print and radio ads quoting well-known conservatives George Will, former Wyoming Sen. Alan Simpson and former Georgia Rep. Bob Barr, among others, all voicing

opposition to the Federal Marriage Amendment.

"This ad campaign will show that people of all political stripes see this amendment for what it is – a divisive and reckless use of our Constitution," said HRC President Cheryl Jacques.

"There is nothing conservative about mandating a one-size-fits-all national social policy in a governing-from-the-grave amendment that will handcuff future generations. When it comes to the Constitution, we should defend it, not amend it," said Chuck Muth, president of ad cosponsor Citizen Outreach, a limited-government non-profit hosting a website featuring conservative opposition to a federal marriage amendment.

Radio ads will run in 12 cities across the country during conservative talk shows, including those of Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Dr. Laura. Print ads ran in January in newspapers around the country.

## Cheney Still Against Marriage Amendment

Denver – In an interview published in the *Rocky Mountain News* last month, Vice President Dick Cheney said he would support President Bush if he backs a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. However, he reiterated his belief that whether to allow gays and lesbians to enter civil unions is "a matter best left to the states."

Cheney, whose daughter is a lesbian, said he would not discuss any advice she had given him on the proposed amendments.

## Lambda Legal Helps Out (Married) Parents

New York – Because gay or lesbian parents leaving a marriage too often feel they have to choose between their children and being out, Lambda Legal is offering assistance. Two publications, released last month, provide guidance in resolving child custody and visitation issues that arise when a couple divorces because one is gay.

"You Don't Need to Choose" provides guidance in establishing custody arrangements, protecting the best interests of the child and maintaining parental rights for the gay or lesbian parent. "What's Best for Your Kids?" urges straight spouses not to use sexual orientation against their newly out co-parent and will be distributed by the Straight Spouse Network and on-line.

"Sexual orientation should-

n't be used as a weapon in child custody battles. Most courts now recognize that sexual orientation has no bearing on what it means to be a good parent," said Michael Adams, Director of Education and Public Affairs at Lambda Legal.

## I Love a Parade!

Pasadena, CA – The Tournament of Roses announced the theme of the 2005 New Year's Day parade will be 'Celebrate Family' and that it includes ALL families. As reported at 365gay.com, in a statement to the *Pasadena Star News* last month, David Davis, parade president, said 'I'm not going to judge anybody's lifestyles. We don't have any prejudice or bias.' Although a traditionalist, Davis welcomes all definitions of family, including gay and lesbian couples with children.

Companies spend millions of dollars on their floats. It is unlikely that any specific LGBT organization will have its own float in the parade due to the prohibitive cost. However, the gay market is worth an estimated \$500 billion and businesses are anxious to cash in. It is expected that several companies will include same-sex families in their floats.

With the Tournament of Roses parade shown around the world the parade could offer the biggest exposure of gay families ever seen on television in a single event.

## Methodists to Put Lesbian On Trial

Seattle – For the first time in sixteen years, the United Methodist Church will put a minister in good standing on trial for being a lesbian. The UMC's Pacific Northwest Conference Committee on Investigation voted to send Rev. Karen P. Dammann, minister at Ellensburg United Methodist Church, to trial for violating church law which bars non-celibate gays from serving in the denomination's clergy.

As reported at 365gay.com Dammann came out in 2001 to the Conference's bishop, Elias P. Galvan, in a letter advising him she was living in a partnered, covenanted relationship with another woman, and that they had a son together.

Bishop Galvan filed charges against Dammann but twice failed to get the required votes to send her trial. Galvan appealed, and last month, the Committee on Investigation voted to send Dammann to trial.

"The case has become much bigger than me now, and I hope it will give the church an opportunity

to grow. The ultimate act of trying someone for being gay is bound to shake the tree, I hope, in the direction of inclusiveness," said Dammann in a statement released by her attorney.

## Transwoman Seeks Seat in Michigan

Lansing, MI – Melissa Sue Robinson is running for office again. Robinson, founder and president of the National Association for the Advancement of Transgender People, filed to seek election to the 68th District of the Michigan House of Representatives. This bid follows her unsuccessful campaigns last year for mayor and school board, and in 1997 for city council. Robinson, a transsexual, ran her first campaign as Charles Staelens Jr., her birth name.

Robinson, 53, describes herself as "a male to female, post-operative child of God and contributing member of society." She received over 3,000 votes in the school board election and placed third in the mayoral primary. In an effort to advance the transgender cause, she is running for the State House with the goal to provide civil rights legislation to transgender, taxpaying citizens. If elected, Robinson will pursue the inclusion of "gender identity and expression" into all civil rights laws.

## School District Must Eliminate Harrassment

San Francisco – The Morgan Hill Unified School District, where lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students have suffered harassment and violence, agreed last month to a wide-ranging training program and policy protections. The settlement ends a five-year-long federal lawsuit brought by the ACLU and the National Center for Lesbian Rights. The settlement requires that all administrators, teachers, campus monitors, custodians, safety officers, and bus drivers in the district take part in annual training programs devoted exclusively to issues of harassment and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The district will implement an age-appropriate training program for students and an anti-discrimination policy barring harassment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Damages will also be paid to the plaintiffs.

## Jewish Groups For Same-Sex Marriage

Boston – An overwhelming vote by the Massachusetts Jewish

Community Relations Council in favor of same-sex marriage placed the group squarely opposed to the Catholic bishops. The powerful umbrella group represents primarily the liberal element within the Jewish community. The vote last month came as the state's Roman Catholic bishops were stepping up the rhetoric against same-sex marriage.

The Catholic bishops recently announced they will mail more than a million fliers to Catholic households in Massachusetts, urging support for a Constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. The flier also calls on the faithful to lobby lawmakers to support an amendment defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

As reported at 365gay.com, the Jewish Community Relations Council also "opposes any effort to amend the state Constitution to bar same-sex couples from marrying, or to deny legal benefits to same-sex couples and their families."

Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism have supported LGBT rights for a number of years, permit gay and lesbian rabbis, and allow temples to perform blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples.

## Chilean Trans Leader Threatened

New York – According to Amnesty International, someone repeatedly fired a gun at trans activist Rodrigo Lopez Barrera as he was walking in San Felipe two days after he received an anonymous telephone death threat. The organization is mobilizing its membership to write Chilean authorities, demanding guarantees for Barrera's safety.

As president of TravesChile of Aconcagua, Barrera has filed legal complaints and publicly reported harassment and attacks against the transvestite community. Authorities are not known to have carried out any investigation, and in the past, have failed to follow up adequately reports of similar threats and attacks.

Amnesty International is concerned that the violence and threats directed at Lopez are part of a pattern of harassment of LGBT people in Chile, where two transgender men have been killed in unexplained circumstances. The organization is working to send a signal to the Chilean authorities that the failure to respond to such actions is unacceptable and will not be tolerated by the international community. ▼