

the rest of our world

LGB Students Safe from Outing

LOS ANGELES – A federal judge rejected an Orange County school district's claim that it was within its rights to reveal a student's sexuality to her parents, as reported on 365gay.com early last month.

In its motion to dismiss the case, the school claimed that Charlene Nguon did not have a legal interest in keeping her sexual orientation private because she was affectionate with her girlfriend at school. The court disagreed, ruling that Nguon can proceed with her legal claim that the principal violated her constitutional privacy rights.

"I am very glad that the judge agreed Charlene can continue to stand up for her rights," said Nguon's mother, Crystal Chhun. "The person to decide when and how to talk with our family about her sexual orientation should have been my daughter, not the principal."

Nguon was an 'A' student, ranked in the top 5 percent of her class, but when she kissed her girlfriend on campus she was disciplined and told either she or the girlfriend would have to transfer to another school. She was also a candidate for the National Honor Society until the offer was rescinded because of discipline, including one week-long suspension, for hugging her girlfriend on campus.

Yes to No, No to Ryan White

WASHINGTON, DC – According to the HRC, last month Congress put the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans at risk in passing the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations conference report that cuts HIV/AIDS prevention programs, and flat-funds most of the Ryan White CARE Act.

By a 215-213 vote, the House passed the Appropriations conference report, which contains inadequate funding for federal HIV/AIDS programs. Moreover, the bill provides an increase of \$11 million in funding for abstinence-only education programs.

Further abandoning a science-based prevention strategy, an amendment that would have directed that all federally funded sex education programs teach medically accurate information was dropped.

Hard Drives Fight AIDS

CYBERSPACE – A massive project is harnessing the power of tens of thousands of personal computers around the world in a bid to find potential drugs to more effectively fight the global scourge of AIDS, as reported in *The Canadian Press*.

A virtual supercomputer grid, created by IBM, will allow individuals and businesses to donate downtime on their personal computers via a secure website. The idle PCs will be used to run millions of computations in the search for chemical compounds that could eventually provide more effective HIV therapies, the company announced in late November.

"We've been working over the last year to build the number of PCs that are connected and we've also been working on a first research project, analyzing all the proteins in the human body," Stanley Litow, IBM vice-president for corporate community relations, said from New York.

"But now we are adding this AIDS project. This is brand new to the grid, and the idea is to take years off of the research that would be required to find a cure for AIDS."

The project, dubbed FightAIDS@Home, involves virtual testing of hundreds of thousands of chemical compounds to see how they react to a particular protein of the human immunodeficiency virus.

Ford Supports Fairness

WASHINGTON, DC – Ford Motor Company released a statement last month saying it would feature all of its brands in a 2006 ad campaign in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender-themed publications. Questions about indications that Ford had made a deal with the right-wing extremist group American Family Association to cease advertising for its Jaguar and Land Rover brands in community publications were put to rest with this announcement, said the Human Rights Campaign.

"Ford's action is a positive outcome and win for equality and fairness," said Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese.

A broad coalition of more than two-dozen lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organizations commended the company for reaffirming its support for the LGBT community. Ford also reaffirmed its commitment to its progressive workplace policies, and said it would place corporate advertising in LGBT publications on behalf of all of its brands, including Jaguar and Land Rover, and

would continue financial support for LGBT organizations and events consistent with its business condition.

"Today's statement from Ford Motor Company ... is conclusive proof of what Ford leaders have repeatedly assured us – that there never was any deal with anti-LGBT organizations concerning Ford's support for our community," the coalition's statement read in part.

Let Peace Begin with Pee

SAN FRANCISCO – The Transgender Law Center recently released *Peeing In Peace: A Resource Guide For Transgender Activists and Allies*.

The guide will help transgender community members and allies confront gender-based discrimination and harassment in public bathrooms.

Transgender people are regularly alienated from employment, education, social services, and consumer environments simply because they are prevented from using the correct bathroom or because they are harassed while doing so.

"Bathrooms are a common place where transgender people are assaulted or ridiculed simply because someone does not like the way they look or act," said Bryan Burgess, TLC's former Safe Bathroom Access Campaign Coordinator and co-author of the guide. "We created *Peeing In Peace* so that individual community members could protect themselves individually and work together to change the way in which society thinks about bathroom safety."

Peeing In Peace (PiP) provides information about legal rights and advocacy tools for anyone who faces this kind of discrimination. Grassroots activists will also be able to use PiP to help create a bathroom safety campaign.

French Lesbians Spark Baby Boom

BELGIUM – Denied artificial insemination in their native country, many French lesbians have been crossing the border to Belgium in search of medical procedures to get pregnant, according to an Agence France-Presse report relayed by Advocate.com. The trend is creating a new sort of baby boom at Belgian fertility clinics.

Last year, 72 percent of the patients for insemination from sperm donors came from France, and the majority of them were lesbian, according to Dr. Anne Delbaere, head of the fertility clinic at Erasme Hospital in the Belgian capital. Since the clinic opened

some 15 years ago, it has never rejected the requests of lesbians and single women, but it may not be able to continue to meet the demand from the influx of French patients. "We do not have sufficient sperm donations in reserve to meet all the requests" for insemination, Delbaere said at a recent conference on gay parenting in Paris.

Since the French bioethical law of 1994, medical help for procreation is reserved for heterosexual couples who are married or who have been together for more than two years. Belgium, however, where same-sex marriage is legal, has not passed legislation on this issue. The specialized clinics there decide on the criteria used for access to medical procedures for procreation.

Marriage in South Africa

CAPE TOWN – South Africa became the fifth country to legalize same-sex marriage in early December. The Constitutional Court, the highest court in South Africa, ruled that it is unconstitutional to deny gay and lesbian couples the right to marry, according to 365gay.com.

The court ordered Parliament to amend marriage laws within 12 months. If it fails to act within that time frame, the court said the ruling would automatically change the law to include same-sex unions.

Last year the Supreme Court of Appeal ruled that the definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman discriminated unfairly against same-sex couples.

The Department of Home Affairs appealed the ruling to the Constitutional Court, arguing that the appeal court violated the rule of the separation of powers by usurping Parliament's authority to make law. "Same-sex partnerships are a relatively new phenomena," said the Department of Home Affairs' advocate Marumo Moerane, sparking laughter in the packed gallery. He then said that, "We don't know whether single-sex relationships involve the idea of mutual support."

South Africa's post-apartheid constitution states that GLBT individuals have the same rights as any other individual. Section 9 of the Constitution outlaws discrimination in South Africa based on sexual orientation.

The ruling was the latest in a series of legal wins dating back to 1998 when sodomy was decriminalized. The following year immigrant partners of South African lesbians and gays were allowed to apply for permanent residence. Same-sex adoption was legalized in 2002. In

2003 the government bowed to pressure and permitted domestic partner benefits.

Gay & Trans Films Go for Gold

BEVERLY HILLS – The cowboy romance *Brokeback Mountain* positioned itself last month as a key Oscar competitor, roping in seven Golden Globe nominations, including best dramatic picture, according to CBS and AP reports.

The Globes were the latest recognition for *Brokeback Mountain*, a critical darling that has received top honors from critics' groups in New York City, Los Angeles and Boston, and also appeared on the American Film Institute's list of the top 10 movies of the year.

Based on a story by Annie Proulx, *Brokeback Mountain* grabbed a supporting actress nomination for Michelle Williams as Ledger's wife, who chooses to ignore her cowboy husband's affair with a man to hold her family together. The movie also scored a directing nomination for Lee and received nominations for best screenplay, score and song.

In addition, director Ang Lee will receive the Human Rights Campaign's Equality Award in February.

Transamerica's Felicity Huffman received two nominations, including best dramatic actress in a film for her role as a man preparing for sex-change surgery.

Dissolution in Vermont

BRATTLEBORO – The lesbian couple who entered into the nation's first Civil Union are splitting up amid allegations of violent behavior, as reported by the Associated Press. Carolyn Conrad, 35, asked a court in October to end her relationship with Kathleen Peterson, 46.

Conrad also obtained a restraining order against her partner, saying Peterson punched a hole in the wall during an argument and threatened to harm a friend. The two had been together for five years when they were legally joined in Brattleboro minutes after Vermont's civil-union law took effect on July 1, 2000.

By the end of 2004, a total of 7,549 same-sex couples had entered civil unions in Vermont. There have been 78 dissolutions. ▼