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- Photographers

We thank the following volunteers who, in addition to our writers' efforts, worked on last month's paper:

DELIVERING:

Thia Artemis, Rick Bersaw, AIDS Project of Southern Vermont, Tom Bivins & Bennett Law, Daryl & Dennis DePaul, Patrick DiDomenico, Kathy Donna, Thom Fleury, Danny Gates, Keith Goslant, Jeni Hurner, Nat Michael, Fran Moravcsik, Fred Pond, Rick Wold

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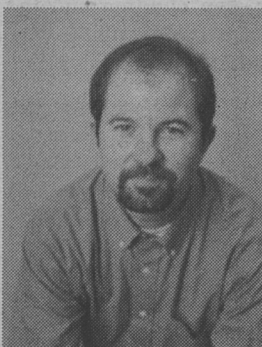
OFFICE MAGIC-MAKERS:

Dana Anderson, Joe Swinyer

TRANSNATION BY JACOB ANDERSON-MINSHALL

Minting Trans Legal Rights

SHANNON MINTER HAS JUST WON \$100,000. He didn't win it playing poker or in the latest state lottery. He doesn't even get to blow his winnings on a new sports car or a trip to Hawaii. Minter, the legal director for the National



Center for Lesbian Rights—who gained national attention when he represented transsexual father Michael Kantaras in the groundbreaking *Floridacustody* case—earned the monetary award the hard way: through dedication and challenging

"Minter came out as transsexual while working at the National Center for Lesbian Rights and says that having a key staff member transition gave the NCLR 'an opportunity to deal with the issue.'"

work. His tireless work on behalf of the LGBT community won Minter a 2005 Leadership for Change award from the Ford Foundation.

The \$100,000 Ford Foundation grant will allow NCLR to hire a managing attorney, so that Minter's time can be spent on big picture projects, like "strategic thinking and strengthening our alliances with people working in other movements."

Minter came out as transsexual while working at NCLR and says that having a key staff member transition gave the organization "an opportunity to deal with the issue." Minter credits NCLR's openness to transgender issues, to their birth as a feminist organization.

"[NCLR] was always paying attention to the gender-based foundation of sexual orientation discrimination. So it has been a very natural fit to take on transgender cases. It is one of our core program areas now."

Minter points to the Michael Kantaras case as a "real turning point" in the advocacy for transgender rights because it reached millions of viewers when it was broadcast on Court TV.

"It was the first time that the country had a chance to hear the details of what it means to be transsexual; the details about the medical treatment and the psychological aspect, about transgender people being parents, getting married. We still to this day hear from people who write us because they remember seeing that trial on TV. And so many people said it opened their eyes."

In what Minter calls "a fascinating and wonderful coincidence," one of those people was TV's Dr. Phil, who got involved in the case after the decision was overturned by a Florida appeals court. Minter credits the trial court win to Michael Kantaras' presence and the testimony about his fathering skills, but the appeals court never saw any of those things.

"All you get at the appellate level is the chance to file a brief and make a short oral argument. They don't get to see the person. They literally don't see the person. Unfortunately that allows them to sort of fill in the blanks with their own imagination which tends to be based on negative stereotypes. So that was a very disarming—to be reversed on appeal."

After that disappointing reversal, NCLR was delighted when Dr. Phil got involved and they were able to forge a settlement allowing Kantaras to retain his parental rights and access to his children.

Another issue, which weighs heavily on the activist lawyer, is that of trans youth, who are facing great odds as they come out younger and younger. Minter, who founded NCLR's Youth Program in 1993 argues that a significant percentage of these kids are coming out really young, "like four or five years old."

When kids come out that early, they face difficulties both at school and at home. The NCLR says that 90 percent of gender variant youth surveyed nationwide reported feeling unsafe at school because of their gender expression. In addition to their legal advocacy, NCLR (www.nclrights.org) provides free legal information to LGBTQ youth, and their supporters.

"We are getting so many calls now from parents and teachers of very young children who are identifying as the other gender and having big problems at school and sometimes at home. We're getting custody battles where one parent is supportive and another parent's not. We just were helping out with a case where [a] mom lost custody of her child in Ohio, and there's a court order requiring everyone to basically disregard the child's gender identity. That's really painful." ▼



Trans FTM writer Jacob Anderson-Minshall can be reached at jake@trans-nation.org.