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ALABAMA

Victory Fund Fights to Preserve Historic Win

The Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund in August urged the Alabama Democratic Party to certify Patricia Todd's victory in the primary election for the state's 54th legislative district, according to a U.S. Newswire report. Todd was the top vote-getter in a 5-way primary on June 6, and beat opponent Gaynell Hendricks by 59 votes in a July 18 runoff. Local election officials reported no irregularities and declared Todd the winner after a recount.

Despite Todd's ability to win the most votes twice, a formal challenge to the election was filed by Hendricks' mother-in-law, the report said. That challenge has now been tainted by powerful party officials, disappointed by the election results, seeking to improperly influence the decision of a panel that will hear evidence in the matter, according to reports. There is no Republican opponent vying for the seat in November, so Todd's primary win would make her the state's first-ever openly gay elected official.

LOS ANGELES

Still Too Few of Us on the Tube

After a landmark year of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) representation in films such as *Brokeback Mountain*, *Capote* and *Transamerica*, the broadcast television networks continue to underrepresent their LGBT audience, according to an analysis conducted by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), the nation's LGBT media advocacy group. The number of LGBT scripted representations on the six major broadcast networks will comprise only 1.3% of all series regular characters on the networks' 2006-07 schedule.

"In the last year, we've seen a tremendous amount of visibility on the big screen, reaching a large audience anxious to see our stories," says GLAAD President Neil G. Giuliano. "The networks, though, are not tapping into this audience and are failing to represent the reality and diversity of their viewers and the world around them."

SAN FRANCISCO

Group Boycotted WorldPride Jerusalem

QUIT! (Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism) condemned the decision by Jerusalem Open

House and other promoters of World Pride Jerusalem to go ahead with the planned week of international pride events scheduled for August 2006, "despite Israel's ongoing assault on civilian communities in Lebanon and Gaza. Israel, which killed 4 UN workers in Lebanon on July 26, has been accused by Human Rights Watch of using cluster bombs in civilian areas, in violation of international law, the group's website at boycottworldpride.org said.

TORONTO

International AIDS Conferees Hopeful, Impatient

A sense of hopefulness tempered with growing impatience marked the end of the XVI International AIDS Conference (AIDS 2006) last month, with scientists, clinicians, policymakers, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and other community leaders and caregivers calling for an accelerated pace to scale up HIV prevention, care and treatment programs in resource-limited settings.

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), at the end of 2005 an estimated 39 million people worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS, the vast majority in developing countries.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

New Initiative to Help LGBT Youth

Two advocacy groups announced a new initiative this August to help protect LGBT young people in child welfare systems across the country, according to a 365Gay.com report.

Lambda Legal and the Child Welfare League of America hope a new publication will serve as a guide for helping the foster care systems to better meet the needs of gay youth in their care. Called "Out of the Margins," it is a compilation of the experiences of LGBTQ youth in care along with concrete solutions to end the problems they face in the foster care, juvenile justice, and homeless/transitional living systems.

"LGBTQ youth are far more likely to experience abuse and neglect, including being thrown out, within their homes than their non-LGBTQ peers, leading to a disproportionate over-representation in the child welfare system," 365Gay.com quoted Jackie Yodashkin, a spokesperson for Lambda Legal. ▼

vermont news

POLITICS

North Country Justice of the Peace

Mary Schwartz Vies for a Second Term

BY LYNN MCNICOL

BAKERSFIELD - As one of Bakersfield's seven justices of the peace, Mary Schwartz has performed two civil unions and no marriages to date, and so far has heard no tax grievances.

"It's a thrill to do civil unions," said Schwartz, who is serving the second year of her first term as JP. It's a low-key job, "not a real job," she says. The other part of her job as JP will someday include hearing tax grievances. But since tax appraisals were completed prior to her first run for office, and may not occur again for another year or two, she has not yet been part of the grievance process. So for the time being, "doings are minimal" for the volunteer public servant.

Schwartz, a Democrat, is running for a second two-year term, which will take effect in February 2007. If she is re-elected, she may get to hear some of those tax grievances that some JPs avoid by not

running for office again, she said with a laugh.

Justices of the peace also help count paper ballots at town meetings, and as notaries, may also register voters, Schwartz said. The number of JPs is based on a town's population, and may change as the number of residents goes up or down.

Justices of the peace, along with the town board, are members of the town's Board of Civil Authority, which hears tax grievances during a reappraisal of property. Vermont's Secretary of State provides workshops periodically to train the JPs in their work.

While JPs don't receive salaries for the duties they perform, they may receive pay for holding civil unions, marriages and as notaries. Schwartz said she has not accepted pay for the services she has provided.

Serving as a justice of the peace may be a "low-demand civic job," but Schwartz strongly encourages



Mary Schwartz PHOTO: EUAN BEAR

anyone interested in public service to run for JP in his or her area.

"It's certainly a way to get involved in town politics," she said.

Schwartz lives in Bakersfield with her partner Euan Bear, former editor of *OITM*. The couple was joined in a civil union in 2000. ▼

HEALTH

25 Years Later, AIDS Remains at Large

BY JESSI BURG

When AIDS first appeared, it was known as the gay disease. At the start of the pandemic, no one knew what caused AIDS, how it was spread or how it could be treated. As information slowly dribbled out, AIDS quickly became associated with the queer community and immediately gained a stigma.

Nearly 25 years later, there is a wealth of information available, along with a series of treatments, while. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 45 percent of all people living with AIDS in the United States are gay men. In Vermont, this figure rises to 58 percent, even though the Department of Health only keeps statistics on residents of Vermont at the time of diagnosis.

Statistics are tricky, however, and there are loopholes. For instance, the Department of Health claims there are only 438 people living with HIV/AIDS in Vermont, but Vermont CARES, Vermont's largest and oldest HIV/AIDS organization, claims the number is closer to 600, including people living with HIV/AIDS who don't know it. Another example is the transgender community. There are no reliable statistics on the actual number of transpeople currently living with HIV/AIDS, though they are

believed to be a high-risk group. High incidences of sex work, poverty and drug use contribute to the spread of AIDS in the trans community, thus increasing the rate of HIV/AIDS. In addition, the trans community is physically at a higher risk for HIV/AIDS as genital surgery can irritate skin, causing breakage and increasing the risk of disease. This is especially true for male to female transwomen. Socially, the transgender community suffers much higher rates of physical and sexual abuse, again increasing the likelihood of infection.

The various methods of sexual activity have varying rates of disease contraction, again putting gay men at high risk. Anal sex has a one in 20 chance of contracting a disease, compared to one in 100 for male-to-female vaginal sex. In theory, it could be possible to transmit HIV/AIDS from female to female without the use of sex toys; however, there have been no proven cases.

Regular testing and education programs are key to preventing the spread of AIDS. Vermont CARES offers anonymous testing every Monday from 4 to 7 p.m. at their centers in Burlington, Rutland and St. Johnsbury. The organization also provides counseling, advocacy and other services for HIV-positive individuals. According to Kelly

Brigham, Prevention Director at Vermont CARES, the organization has around 125 clients located all over Vermont. The majority of their clients are gay men, though there are representatives of all sectors of society. Many of their clients moved to Vermont from out of state, due to the lack of health care in many places for HIV/AIDS patients. According to Kelly, the spread of AIDS is more severe in large cities due to the greater concentration of people. Diseases proliferate when there are a lot of people in a small space, and AIDS is no exception.

These days, AIDS is a political issue, along with a global one. It is important to be vocal in the fight for funding and research into both the disease itself and education about its causes and effects. Despite research, 40,000 new cases occur in the United States alone every year. Of these, just under half are gay men. Despite the decrease in cases and the increase in knowledge and information, clearly, AIDS in the queer community is something to remain concerned about. ▼

➤ Additional information can be found at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at cdc.gov or locally at any of the Vermont CARES centers.