

➔ the rest of our world

SOUTH AFRICA Parliament OKs Same-Sex Marriage

A bill allowing same-sex couples to marry has been passed overwhelmingly by the country's Parliament, and is expected to be passed by the National Council of Provinces and signed into law by President Thabo Mbeki, CNN.com reported in November.

The new law was drawn up in response to a Constitutional Court ruling issued a year ago. The court said the existing marriage law was unconstitutional because it discriminated against same-sex couples; and issued a deadline of December 1, 2006 to correct the discriminatory legislation, the report said.

FLORIDA First Health Coverage for Transsexuals

In what is believed to be the first time in the U.S., a South Florida woman has been approved for an individual health insurance policy issued to her post-operative transgender, GLINN Gay News reported last month.

At age 56, Melissa (last name withheld by request), a woman in good physical and mental health, faced discrimination when it came to getting health insurance, because she had completed gender reassignment surgery six months before.

Following rejections by numerous insurance underwriters, she contacted Steven Shulman, a licensed insurance professional based in Miami. Only Humana Health Insurance provided Melissa with comprehensive health coverage, the report said.

SANTA BARBARA, CA Experts Protest Pentagon Re- Classification of Homosexuality

Congressman Marty Meehan (D-MA), the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association sent letters to the Defense Department in November protesting a recently revised military instruction, which now suggests that homosexuality is a defect, the Michael D. Palm Center said in November.

The revised instruction no longer says that being gay is a mental illness. Instead, it includes homosexuality in a list of "conditions, circumstances and defects" alongside bedwetting, alcoholism, personality disorders, mental retardation, and repeated

venereal disease infections.

In the November letter, the American Psychological Association asked the Pentagon to revise the instruction so as to "eliminate the continued stigmatization of homosexuality as a defect." Meehan said that, "it is my strong belief that homosexuality is in no way a defect and that there is no scientific reason to include it in such a list."

MEXICO CITY MCC Hails Civil Union Law

The Metropolitan Community Church last month joined its voice with people of goodwill everywhere who have great cause to celebrate as walls of discrimination continue to fall, according to a MCC press release.

While seven U.S. states passed initiatives in November to ban marriage or civil unions between same-sex couples, Mexico City's Assembly joined the municipalities of Buenos Aires and Rio Grande de Sul, Brazil, in passing legislation to legally recognize same-sex and straight civil unions, MCC Moderator Rev. Nancy L. Wilson said.

"We commend the courage and conviction of the Assembly," said Wilson, "and all those who rightly perceive the distinction between civil equality and church doctrine or practice."

PHILADELPHIA Equality Forum Demands Apology from CNN

CNN determined not to rebroadcast a segment of "Larry King Live" in which Bill Maher speculated on the sexual orientation of Ken Mehlman, Chair of the Republican National Committee, and deleted Mr. Maher's statement from the published transcript, said Malcolm Lazin, executive director of the Equality Forum in November.

A CNN and "Larry King Live" spokeswoman stated in an email, "When someone says something potentially 'defamatory' that we don't expect them to say live on the air, we typically won't be liable for it. However, if we continue to rebroadcast it, without any reporting of our own or any comment from the subject of the 'accusation,' we could be legally responsible for what that guest said."

"CNN needs to apologize to the gay community," Lazin stated. "Being accurately or inaccurately called gay is neither 'defamatory' nor an 'accusation' any more than is being called Jewish, Irish or Hispanic. CNN's official statement is homophobic. As a global news organization, CNN needs to repudiate the statement and apologize."

in the news...

PHILANTHROPY

For the Barony of All Vermont, 'Tis Always the Season to Give!

BY KRIS ROWLEY

The Holiday Season is upon us. It is the season of giving and sharing. Whether the giving is to family and friends or a favorite charity, we all seem to open our hearts and our pocketbooks at this time of year.

However, there are some organizations that consider giving to be a year-round activity.

One such organization is the Barony of All Vermont, a nonprofit organization that raises money for other nonprofit organizations in Vermont and some surrounding counties of New Hampshire. The Barony supports diversity in membership; welcoming gay, lesbian, straight, bi and transgender individuals. We are a part of an international organization called the Imperial Court System (ICS) that includes groups from all across Canada, the United States, and Mexico. The court system has been in existence for more than 40 years, and has raised several hundred thousand dollars to give to nonprofit organizations that, in turn, help individual communities.

The public side of the organization is based on "camp fun." Monarchs are voted in by the membership and reign for one year. Depending on whether a group is an Imperial Court or a Barony, the Monarch titles are Empress and Emperor, or Baroness and Baron, respectively. The members start out as Lords and Ladies, and progress up the ladder according to their contributions of time and effort. Each rank has a set of requirements that needs to be met to achieve the rank. Members may be as active as they choose to be. It is all in fun.

The organizations we choose as beneficiaries are as diverse as our membership, from children-related organizations to those serving people living with HIV/AIDS and breast cancer. Our primary purpose is to raise money. Our secondary purpose is to demonstrate to the general public that diversity is not something to fear. Most of our fundraising is done by producing drag shows.

There are usually three formal events a year. The biggest event is our Adornment, which is held in August. In this event, the reigning Monarch(s) step down and celebrate their reign with other court members from all across the country. The new Monarch(s) are presented and crowned at the end of the evening to begin their yearlong reign.

The Monarch's Ball, another formal event, was held in September at the Holiday Inn in Rutland, hosted by Baron VI, His Most Regal Highness Tantalus. The beneficiary for this event was SafeSpace, a domestic violence prevention organization based in Burlington. It was a gala evening with much glitter and glam. There were drag queens and kings from Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York and Vermont in attendance. There was a silent auction that ran the entire evening, a Chinese auction, and a 50/50 raffle. There was also a surprise "marriage" proposal that all were witness to! One never knows what may happen at an event. By the end of the evening, the Barony had raised enough money to give SafeSpace \$983.34.



Baron I & II of VT, Kristoff and Empress 13 of NYC, Panzi

The next fundraiser was far less formal and a "frightful" evening! The Monsters Ball II was held at the American Legion Hall in White River Junction at the end of October. The beneficiary for this event was the Rutland Humane Society. As may be noted, the Barony tries to take care of ALL members of our community, even the four-legged ones. There was a costume contest that was decided by contestants trying to coax the audience members to put dollar bills in their trick or treat bag. By the end of a fun-filled evening of horror, a total of \$732.40 had been raised for the Humane Society.

The Barony keeps 20 percent of the money raised from each event to cover operating expenses such as promotion, advertising, printing of flyers and so on. Individual members do not receive any money for what they do. So, when you come to a Barony event, you can be sure that any money you donate goes directly to the beneficiary.

On behalf of the members of the Barony of All Vermont, we wish everyone a very safe, healthy and happy Holiday Season! ▼

➔ The Barony of All Vermont will host a Leather and Lace show at the Holiday Inn in South Burlington on January 13, 2007. Tickets are \$10 at the door.

➔ The Barony of All Vermont is looking for new members! If what you have read sounds like fun and something you would like to be involved with, please contact us at www.baronyofallvermont.org or Kris at cro1025261@aol.com. To find out more about the Imperial Court System go to www.impcourt.org.

➔ Kris Rowley is President, Board of Directors of the Barony of All Vermont, and Baron I and II. To learn more, see www.baronyofallvermont.org.