

# OITM Roundup: State, National and World News Briefs

compiled by Kip Roberson

## Vermont CARES Announces Program Expansion

**BURLINGTON --** The Men's Health Project is a program funded by the VT Department of Health to stop the spread of HIV infection among men who have sex with other men (MSM). Vermont CARES has recently hired Tom Aloisi of Burlington to coordinate the program.

"The MSM community is still very much at risk for HIV infection," said Aloisi. "Many other communities have become involved with fighting HIV/AIDS, but unfortunately, we [MSM] are still on the front lines of the epidemic."

The program includes safer sex education in a variety of ways, including large social events, small group gatherings, and outreach at places where men meet other men. Most men who see themselves as gay or bisexual have learned the basics of safer sex at some point," says Aloisi. "Our goal is to create opportunities where men

can talk about safer sex in comfortable settings. Some of our work may be controversial, but we are not the sex police. We need to educate as many people as possible to combat this disease, through knowledge, education, and skills training."

The Men's Health Project will be sponsoring a variety of programs throughout Chittenden, Addison, Washington, and Rutland counties, all of them designed to be fun as well as educational. "Last month's tea dance is a good example of how an educational program can be a lot of fun," said John Olson, HIV/AIDS Education Coordinator at Vermont CARES. "We need to develop a community where men are comfortable discussing safer sex with each other. A little levity helps make a potentially embarrassing situation more comfortable to talk about."

The MHP will be sponsoring a free course in peer education about safer sex on October 15th. To register for this course or to find out about volunteer opportunities in the MHP, please call (802)863-2437.

## More Heterosexual Couples Sign Up for State Benefits

**MONTPELIER --** Almost 140 Vermont state employees signed their unmarried partners up for health benefits in July during an open enrollment period.

Heterosexual couples outnumbered gay couples by a ratio of seven to one. Of the 136 unmarried couples, 119 were heterosexual and the other 17 were homosexual. "It's not out of the realm of what we expected," said state Personnel Commissioner Thomas Torti. The new coverage went into effect August 1.

Vermont is the first state in the nation to offer "domestic partner" benefits to its employees. The decision to extend benefits was made in June to settle a grievance filed by a state worker who challenged a ruling that same-sex partners would not be eligible.

The question of whether to extend benefits to domestic partners has been viewed as a gay and lesbian issue.

To qualify for the state benefits, workers must sign an affidavit stating they have lived with their partner for at least six months and that the couple is involved in an "exclusive (and) enduring" relationship.

The cost to the state of extending the benefits has not been calculated yet. Initial estimates put the cost at \$75,000, although it should be higher because about a third more couples signed up than anticipated. (*Burlington Free Press*)

## Gay Elite Is a Myth

**WASHINGTON, D.C. --** An independent study at the University of Maryland at College Park on the impact of anti-gay job discrimination has found that gay men and lesbians earn less than their non-gay counterparts with similar education, training and occupations. The findings refute the stereotype of gay people as an "affluent elite" unworthy of equal rights under the law. Federal civil rights laws do not protect Americans from being fired, refused work, paid less or otherwise treated unfairly in the job market solely because of their sexual orientation.


The study, "Economic Evidence of Sexual Orientation Discrimination," marks the first scientific economic research

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