

National/International News

Scouts Awarded Citizenship Badges

Berkeley, CA - Members of a local cub scout den were awarded citizenship badges for petitioning Boy Scout Headquarters to end its ban on gays in Scouting. (*The Advocate*)

Gay Deputy Sheriff Wins Jury Trial

Orlando, FL - In a precedent-setting lawsuit, a Florida jury ruled in favor of a deputy sheriff fired because he is gay. Orange County Sheriff Walter Gallagher was charged with violating Deputy Sheriff Thomas Woodard's constitutional rights, including his right to privacy under the Florida State constitution. The jury rejected the Sheriff's claim that Woodard resigned voluntarily, and found that he was coerced into resigning following an investigation by the Sheriff into Woodard's sexual orientation and private life.

In April 1989, despite Woodard's exemplary performance and consistently high evaluations by supervisors and co-workers, the Sheriff's office launched an investigation into his off-duty sexual activity, based on information that he is gay. Although there was never any allegation bearing on Woodard's job performance, the Sheriff subjected him to a lie detector examination about his private life and adult sexual relationships. Woodard was then forced to resign because of the Sheriff's belief that "homosexuality is unnatural, immoral, and inexcusable."

The case is expected to go all the way to the Florida Supreme Court, where it will set the stage for a landmark ruling on the privacy rights of gay men and lesbians. (*Lambda Legal Defense Fund*)

Weld Creates First Commission on Gay & Lesbian Youth

Boston, MA - Governor William Weld signed an executive order on February 10, creating the first in the nation Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth. The commission was created to advise the Governor and Secretaries of Human Services, Education, and Communities and Development about the creation of programs and services to help lesbian and gay youth in Massachusetts. Representatives from over 20 gay and lesbian and groups from around the state, as well as high school and college students, attended the signing. "There is no greater tragedy than the loss of young life to suicide," said Weld. "The unfortunate

reality is that nearly 30% of youth suicides are committed by gay and lesbian youth. More than 25% of young gays and lesbians are forced to leave home because of conflicts over their sexual identity." (*USA Today, Coalition for Lesbian & Gay Civil Rights*)

Texas Appeals Court Rules Sodomy Law Unconstitutional

Austin, TX - A Texas appeals court upheld a lower court ruling that the state's 1879 statute outlawing sodomy between consenting adults is unconstitutional. Chief Justice Jimmy Carroll, who wrote the court's 3-0 opinion said, "The state has not met its burden of showing that a compelling governmental objective justifies the intrusion." District Judge Paul Davis had ruled in December that the statute was unconstitutional. That decision was appealed by Texas Attorney general Dan Morales, who will also appeal the Court of Appeals ruling in the Texas Supreme Court. (*The New York Times*)

Levi Strauss Grants Domestic Partner Benefits

San Francisco, CA - Levi Strauss and Co., the world's largest clothing manufacturer will begin offering spousal health benefits July 1 to partners of its gay, lesbian, and unmarried heterosexual employees in the U.S. With 23,000 employees in the U.S., Strauss is the largest company in the country to offer domestic partner benefits to its employees. (*The Advocate*)

Auburn University Takes Gay & Lesbian Association to Court

Birmingham, AL - The Auburn University Board of Trustees voted unanimously to sue both sides in a dispute over chartering the Auburn Gay and Lesbian Association, a student group on campus. Last November the Student Government Association, acting on ad-

vice from the Rutherford Institute, a Christian legal defense organization, refused to grant a charter to the gay student group. In January, administrators at the University, after a threat of legal action by the ACLU, overruled the student government association and granted the charter. Students then presented a petition and 21,000 signatures to the board, asking them to rescind the charter. Both houses of the state legislature passed resolutions also urging the administration to rescind the charter, claiming that state money should not be spent to sanction groups that advocate the violation of state sodomy and sexual misconduct laws. (*The New York Times*)

Conservative Jews Reject Gay Clergy

New York, NY - The religious standards committee for the Conservative movement rejected a proposal by a California rabbi that would have allowed gays to serve as rabbis. While the committee passed a resolution saying that gays and lesbians were welcome in Conservative congregations "as individual members," it said rabbis may not perform marriages or commitment ceremonies for gays and lesbians. It left up to individual rabbis whether to hire gays and lesbians as teachers or youth leaders or give them lay leadership positions and religious honors. The same day, the nation's largest gay synagogue, Congregation Beth Simchat Torah in Manhattan, voted overwhelmingly to hire a lesbian as its first rabbi. While the synagogue has many Conservative members, it is not affiliated with the Conservative branch and therefore not subject to the ruling.

The Reconstructionist movement, Judaism's most liberal group in the U.S., will begin sanctioning same sex unions. The Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations called on February 14 for "full and complete equality of homosexuals in Jewish life." (*The New York Times, The Advocate*) ▼



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