

OITM Roundup:

State, National and World News Briefs

compiled by Kip M. Roberson

Erica Garfin leaves VT AIDS Council

MONTPELIER -- The Vermont AIDS Council has announced the resignation of Erica Garfin as its executive director. Garfin has served as director of the Council since the organization's creation in 1990.

Garfin stated that she looks upon her years as executive director with pride in what her organization has accomplished. "Before the Council existed, Vermont was largely in denial about the presence of AIDS in our rural state. Thanks to the Council's efforts, the state has begun to shoulder its share of responsibility by providing state funds for AIDS services and by creating programs to support Vermonters living with HIV and AIDS."

The Council is a coalition comprised of the state's five community-based AIDS service organizations and the Vermont People with AIDS Coalition. Established to serve as a network for collaboration among its member organizations, the Council works to create statewide solutions to problems experienced by Vermonters living with HIV and AIDS. In recent years the Council has focused increasingly on shaping public policy and raising awareness about HIV and AIDS among state policy makers and administrative agencies.

Garfin, who cited "non-profit fatigue" as a factor in her decision to resign, said that she considers it a privilege to have served as a voice for Vermont's AIDS community for five years. Garfin's resignation was effective in mid-October.

Canadian Parliament rejects rights for same-gender couples

OTTAWA -- The House of Commons has rejected a gay legislator's proposal to extend legal recognition to same-sex marriages. Real Menard, a member of the opposition Bloc Quebecois, said he was disappointed by the 124-52 vote rejecting his motion, but vowed to keep trying. "We can win other fights to change the human rights act," Menard said. "The next fight we will win."

Menard was backed by most of his Bloc Quebecois colleagues, although eight of the 53-member caucus joined the majority in opposing the motion. A few lawmakers from the governing Liberal party, including Deputy Prime Minister Sheila Copps, supported Menard. (*Bay Windows*)

Group pushes for gay marriage

BOSTON -- With same-sex marriage shaping up as the next big public debate in the area of gay and lesbian rights, a new group is working to ensure that the issue doesn't go the way of the recent gays-in-the-military controversy. "The gay community was largely unprepared for the onslaught of publicity that resulted from our attempts to win the right to serve openly in the military," said Jeff Nickel, founder of Forum on the Right to Marriage (FORM). "Consequently, we missed an opportunity not only to advance civil rights, but to create a more positive impression of lesbians and gay men among mainstream Americans."

"Gay marriage is now an imminent possibility, thanks to *Baehr v. Lewin*, and we have another chance," said Nickel, referring to a landmark case dealing with same-sex marriage in Hawaii. The case is expected to be decided in the plaintiffs' favor when it is reheard next year. Ultimately, that could make Hawaii the first state to legalize gay marriage. Similar efforts are underway elsewhere in the country, said Nickel, and FORM is gearing up for the endeavor. "We want to ensure that the gay community participates effectively in the heated political debate that will most certainly ensue as the issue gains momentum," he said.

The only national organization working exclusively on marriage rights for gays and lesbians, FORM is engaged in public relations, lobbying, outreach and education, and support. FORM maintains a worldwide web site at: <http://nether.net/~rod/html/sub/marriage.html>. For further information contact FORM at 227 Chelsea Street, East Boston, MA 02128; (617)569-9733; email: FORMBoston@aol.com.

Increasing the visibility of straights

WASHINGTON, DC -- A new organization, called And Justice for All, has been formed in the nation's capital to increase the visibility of straights in the gay rights movement. Jonathan Zucker, the organization's executive director, said he hopes the group will be able to bring news of important developments in the progress of the gay rights movement to non-gays. "A lot of useful information is produced every day by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights organizations," Zucker said. "Unfortunately, much of this information never reaches heterosexuals who would use it. And Justice for All will focus on getting them in the loop and giving them the tools they need to support this movement."

The group can be contacted at: And Justice for All; P.O. Box 53079; Washington, DC 20009; by phone at (202)298-9362; or via the Internet at Jst4All@aol.com. (*in newsweekly*)

Action by 'Jane Roe' cheered

BOSTON -- The head of an organization of gays who oppose abortion released a statement lauding the announcement by Norma McCorvey, the lesbian plaintiff in the landmark *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision, that she was joining anti-abortion forces.

McCorvey, according to news accounts, has taken a job with Operation Rescue, an anti-abortion group. The group is also known for its strong anti-gay positions.

Philip Arcidi said that McCorvey's public statement that she has changed her views on abortion shows "continued hope for a recognition of the rights of the unborn in our country." Arcidi heads the Pro-Life Alliance of Gays and Lesbians (PLAGAL). (*Washington Blade*)

Pat Sajak joins conservative think tank

CLAREMONT, CA -- Pat Sajak, host of the television game show *Wheel of Fortune*, has joined the board of the Claremont Institute, a think tank with ties to some of the extremists in the radical right movement.

The Claremont Institute published a 16-page booklet in 1994 claiming that gay men commonly use gerbils during sex. The brochure, entitled *Homosexuality and Health: Some Public Facts that America's Children Are Not Getting*, charges that "to present

the homosexual lifestyle on a par with family life is as remarkable and reprehensible as to present smoking on a par with eating vegetables, given what we now know about the relation between smoking and lung cancer." (*Washington Blade*)

NEA grant will help fund DC Quilt visit

WASHINGTON, DC -- The AIDS Memorial Quilt will return to the nation's capital in October 1996, thanks to a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, NAMES Project Foundation officials said. The NEA bestowed \$20,000 on the NAMES Project to help fund a Washington visit the weekend of October 11-13 of next year. The Quilt last came to Washington in its entirety in the autumn of 1992.

Project officials estimate that the Quilt will be twice as large as the 1992 showing and more than 23 times larger than its size when it came to the capital in 1987. To carry off the endeavor, the Project is seeking the help of 12,000 volunteers. "The Quilt has grown inexorably since its first showing in 1987," said Mike Smith, director of the effort to bring the Quilt to Washington in 1996. "And with AIDS now a leading cause of death in this country, more and more friends and families are making panels to be added to the Quilt every day."

As with its last visit, the showing of the Quilt will be accented by famous and not-so-famous individuals reading the names of those whose deaths are remembered with a panel in the Quilt. "The litany of the names of the dead will echo unbroken for three days as 2,000 readers -- elected officials, sports figures, celebrities, community and religious leaders, educators, people with AIDS, family members, friends -- each take a turn at the podium," said a news release. The 1996 showing marks the second time an NEA grant has helped fund the Quilt's visit to Washington. (*Washington Blade*)

Bathing beauties of a different sort

ATLANTIC CITY, NJ -- Miss Perfectly Hideous wore black: a crushed velvet top, spandex pants, leather boots that reached mid-thigh and curls. Lots of curls. For her talent, she donned a microphone-equipped headset and gyrated lasciviously as she lip-synched a medley of Janet Jackson hits. When the judges delivered their decision, her painted lips opened wide in a gasp. Then came the song as a 6-foot-4 beauty named Kiki accepted her crown and roses and headed down the runway, practically falling off her high heels.

But she was a he. The site was a gay bar. And the song, which sounded oh-so familiar, carried an amended refrain: "Boy, have we missed America/The good times now, are here to stay/We picked a true beauty, she took the crowd by storm/God knows what she's stuffed in her Maidenform/So there she is ... Miss'd America," the drag queen host crooned to the new winner.

So it went at the fourth annual Miss'd America Pageant, a gender-bending spoof held each year on the night after the Miss America Pageant. Six blocks and a world away from the real thing, seven female impersonators vied for the coveted title, a dime-store crown and a \$300 gift certificate at a store that carries women's shoes in men's sizes up to 16. "Drag queens can never get big-enough shoes," said organizer John J. Schultz, a gay city councilman who owns the bar.

The Atlantic City parody, a fund-raising benefit for the South Jersey AIDS Alliance had lots of the ingredients of the other pageant. Contestants competed in evening gown and talent, but thankfully not swimsuits. But these were no earnest, bright-eyed beauties: Miss Perfectly Disgusting, Chunky Marinara, was a 280-pounder squished into a black V-neck cocktail dress; Miss Perfectly Rotten wore a red sequined dress, blonde wig and glittering earrings that hung to her shoulders; Miss Perfectly Stupid wore a shimmering multicolored gown with red, green and blue beads on top.

David Spatz, an entertainment writer and local TV personality who served as judge, summed up the night's entertainment: "It's everything you expect from Miss America and maybe a little less. It approaches the line of good taste and boldly leaps across it." (*Bay Windows*) ▼

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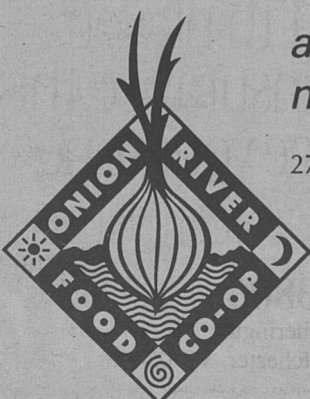
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